15

Administering the Mongol Empire

Ogodei has been severely underrated by historians, perhaps because no one has published a laudatory account of his life. Genghis, Qubilai and even Mongke have had their admirers, even uncritical ones just this side of hagiography, but Ogodei's brilliant successes in foreign policy have rarely been pointed up, nor the way he consolidated Genghis's work and put the empire on a sound financial footing.

It has been insufficiently stressed that Genghis bequeathed to him a poisoned chalice in three ways. Ogodei inherited a financial crisis; he had to assert the power of the khaghan against proud, unruly, anarchic, greedy and aggressive local oligarchs, including his brother Chagatai; and he was a second-generation ruler whose elevation was controversial. Lacking Genghis's personal prestige, massive reputation and imperial charisma as world conqueror, Ogodei had to shore up his position by building an institutional power base.

His power overwhelmingly depended on the imperial bodyguard, the keshig, whose role was particularly important as the centrifugal process which would break up the empire after 1241. He began implicitly reversing Genghis's great imperial work immediately after his death. There were two elements powering this break-up: the tumens and their mini-realms based on actual and fictive kinship; and the imperial clan with its control over the patrimony or ulus. To counteract all this Ogodei depended on the power of his night guards and a strong central administration run by trusted aides.

The key military personality was Eljigidei.[1] Ogodei aimed to dovetail military control with civilian administration by setting up a central secretariat: within this Eljigidei commanded the night guards while Chinqai was chamberlain, keeper of the imperial seal, and decision-maker on the distribution of booty and ultimate civil authority, though

Ogodei never gave him the title of chief minister. Another important official was Nianhe Zhongshan, a Khitan, who was in charge of all written texts relating to the empire – in effect the keeper of archives.[2] As against the military practice of having, say, Chinese troops serve in Khwarezmia and Turkish soldiers in China to prevent collusion and possible revolt in league with local elites, Ogodei opted for a 'horses for courses' approach in civil administration, relying on local experts. Three different major administrative figures thus emerged, representing different cultures: Mahmud Yalavach and fellow Islamists in the old Khwarezmian empire; Yelu Chu Cai, a Khitan, in China, represesenting the Khitan–Chinese–Jurchen constellation; and Chinqai himself, a Nestorian Christian, who was a symbol of the eastern Turks, Kereit, Uighurs and others who embraced Nestorianism.[3]

Chinqai (c. 1169–1252) was of uncertain origin – Naiman, Uighur and Ongud ancestry have variously been attributed to him – but his primary culture seems to have been Chinese, and he spoke the language fluently. He was Genghis's de facto first minister as early as 1206, when he had sixty bureaucrats under him. One of the 'band of few' of the Baljuna Covenant, he accompanied the troublesome Chang Chun on his journey to see Genghis in 1222–23. Chinqai encouraged the commercial alliance between the Mongols and Muslim merchants and even employed some of them as financial experts and tax officials. In Genghis's time Chinqai did not have quite the eminence he was to have under Ogodei, for Genghis appointed the Tangut Tatatonga as his keeper of the seals, and from this appointment came the emphasis on Uighur scripts and Uighur secretaries. When he became Ogodei's chancellor, Chinqai had all imperial decrees and top-level discussions recorded in Mongolian, Turkish, Persian and Chinese as well, on the grounds that the narrow Tatatonga system had allowed members of the secretariat to enrich themselves; corruption was always a problem for the Mongols, largely because the khans thought principally in terms of conquest and glory, not money.[4]

Genghis had spotted early on one of the problems in his empire: the Mongols were heavily dependent on native administrators in the conquered territories, but could they be trusted? He and Chinqai came up with the idea of daruqachi – political commissars – in key cities, law-courts or military commands; the first appointment of such an official mentioned in the sources was at Peking just after its fall in 1215, though later writers have picked up stray indirect references going back

to 1211.[5] Similar to the system known as *hsing-sheng* under the Jin in China, these commissars – nearly all Mongols – were personal representatives of the khan, his plenipotentiaries in conquered territories. They collected taxes, levied troops from the local populace, conducted censuses and sent off tribute to the khan's court. They also supervised and controlled local feudal lords, regional elites and the native bureaucracy.[6] There were also officials called basqaqs, lower in the pecking order precisely because they were not Mongols. These were primarily military figures sent to protect the daruqachi in their tax-collecting role. In time the distinction between basqaq and daruqachi became eroded, to the point where it became customary to use the terms as shorthand tags for military and civilian rulers respectively. But the whole business of basqaqs was essentially an ad hoc mess – some had viceregal powers and some did not; to add to the confusion, khans sometimes sent out quite separate plenipotentiaries extraordinary.[7]

Chinqai's administrative genius was twofold. First, he had to solve problems caused by the Mongols' ignorance of sedentary populations. The Mongols were nomads and warriors and had no one trained for the task of administration. Nor were they linguists, and in their raw state they knew nothing of a money economy. They therefore had to depend on literate, multilingual members of the very nations they had conquered. Like the British in the nineteenth century, they had to rule vast numbers with a tiny bureaucratic force and like them depended on quislings and converts to the Mongol vision of global conquest. Genghis and Ogodei always had the trump card of religious toleration, which tended to make the local clergy their loyal supporters.[8] Secondly, Chinqai had to assert the khan's claim to the wealth of the empire and to ensure that local Mongol aristocrats did not siphon it off surreptitiously. To sugar the pill, Ogodei reorganised his secretariat system across the empire and then allowed powerful local elites representation on the local bodies.[9] In 1229 he created branch secretariats in eastern and western Turkestan and a third in northern China; he later added a fourth, for northern Iran. The purpose of these bodies was to adjudicate on disputes between the khan and the regional rulers and this meant, in this reign, especially, between Ogodei and Chagatai.

This was the context in which Chinqai's protégé Mahmud Yalavach (d. 1254) first made his mark. He was the son of a Turkish-speaking Muslim, a merchant from Khwarezmia. Yalavach senior entered Mongol

service as a diplomat in 1218 and his first assignment was a dangerous embassy to shah Muhammad, who liked to kill Mongol envoys. He then disappeared from history until his re-emergence in 1229 when Ogodei appointed him governor-general of northern China. At the same time his more famous son became governor-general of Central Asia.[10]

The task of Yalavach junior was to restore the shattered economy and infrastructure of Khwarezmia and reform taxation. He hit on the idea of simplifying taxes, reducing them to just two, a poll tax (*qubchir*) and a land tax (*qalan*), with no extraordinary imposts or levies. His system was so successful that a later khan, Mongke, introduced it on an empire-wide basis.[11] But in fulfilling Ogodei's wishes so faithfully, Yalavach fell foul of Chagatai, as we have seen (see above, Chapter 14). Chagatai always loathed Yalavach's close supervision, and the scandal in 1239, when he highhandedly made a land grant not in his gift to a favourite, could have led to civil war had Ogodei not handled it so skilfully.

This crisis had no sooner subsided than an even more serious one followed. In 1238–39 an early proletarian rebellion in Bukhara became so serious that for a time the Mongols were driven out of the city. Ogodei sent a huge army which suppressed the insurrection, but Chagatai argued that only large-scale massacre would inculcate the lesson that it was folly to defy the Mongols. Yalavach appealed to Ogodei and, to Chagatai's fury, Bukhara was spared total destruction. Knowing that a vengeful Chagatai would now throw all his resources into intriguing and manoeuvring to compass Yalavach's downfall, Ogodei transferred his favourite to north China in 1241.[12]

Yet the administrator in Ogodei's reign who has attracted most attention is Yelu Chu Cai (1190–1243), largely because he was not just an able civil servant but a multitalented polymath of the kind that bedazzles intellectuals and historians. He is a controversial figure and much about his career is disputed, especially as he is mentioned neither in the *Secret History* nor in the history by Rashid al-Din. It is not even known for certain whether he was a Confucian or a Buddhist, partly because his attitude to religion was so eclectic.[13] He was born in Peking, the son of a chief minister under the Jin and related by marriage to the founder of the Liao dynasty. It was said that he graduated top of the class in the Chinese civil service examination around the time of the Mongol invasion. He was present in Peking during the terrible siege of 1214–15 and the month-long sack, and found the experience so traumatic that

he suffered a nervous breakdown. Seeking a way out of his dark labyrinth, he studied Buddhism at the feet of the renowned sage Wan-yen (a.k.a. Hsing-hsiu, 1166–1246), who was well known as a syncretist who sought a middle way between Confucianism and Buddhism.[14]

After three years of this (1215–18), he was identified by the Mongols as 'one to note' and recruited into their service. He often amazed his masters with his versatility: he played the lute, was a talented linguist, had a mastery of mathematics and the sacred texts of Confucius, was a lover of fine art and collector of books and musical instruments and wrote interesting travelogues.[15] He was interviewed personally by Genghis, who expressed sympathy for the nervous breakdown but told him he had taken revenge on the Jin on behalf of the Liao and that was something Yelu, as a Khitan, ought to understand.[16] Yelu replied: 'My father and grandfather both served the Jin. How can I, as a subject and a son, be so insincere at heart as to consider my sovereign and my father as enemies?'[17] This was just the sort of thing to impress Genghis, who always placed a high value on self-denying loyalty. Moreover, Yelu appealed to him personally, as he seemed to discern in the tall, long-bearded young man with the sonorous voice a younger version of himself. Yelu was at once recruited into the khan's inner circle.

He was attached to Chagatai's army during the invasion of Turkestan, was present at the siege of Samarkand and was at Genghis's side almost continually until 1226. During those years he combined the offices of scribe-secretary with that of court astrologer. The superstitious Genghis often consulted him, and Yelu accurately predicted the fall of the Khwarezmian empire, the death of shah Muhammad and later of the Jin emperor. He it was who interpreted the sighting of a rhinoceros in India as a bad omen and persuaded Genghis to withdraw from the subcontinent.[18] One of his least palatable tasks was to be deferential towards Chang Chun, the Chinese sage and favourite of Genghis whom Yelu secretly considered a charlatan.

In 1229 Ogodei appointed Yelu as a senior administrator in China with a special brief to investigate methods of taxation. This appointment has been widely misunderstood. One Russian historian, in a moment of hyperbole, remarked that the absence of mention of Yelu in the two principal Mongol sources was 'as strange as if a historian of Louis XIII forgot to mention Richelieu'.[19] But Yelu was never a Richelieu – not even a Mazarin. Quite apart from the consideration that Ogodei never appointed a chief minister, Yelu's remit was restricted to China and every memorandum he sent Ogodei had to be endorsed by his superior, Chinqai, who translated his reports into Uighur.

Nevertheless, the baby should not be thrown out with the bathwater: there is no doubt that on Chinese affairs Yelu's opinion was hugely influential. Yelu persuaded the khan to issue a paper currency backed by silver; this was highly successful and won the admiration of all later European travellers.[20] Influenced by the bloodthirsty Belgutei, prime representative of the 'old Mongols', Ogodei at first inclined to the view that the proper fate for the defeated Jin was genocide, but Yelu quoted the old saw 'a nation conquered from horseback cannot be governed from horseback' and urged on Ogodei the massive wealth that could accrue from taxing a hardworking sedentary population; just as there are no pockets in a shroud, he argued, one cannot generate revenues from people who are dead.[21] Ogodei took the point but challenged Yelu to offer concrete proof of his proposition. Yelu estimated that he could generate a tax yield of 500,000 ounces of silver, 80,000 pieces of silk and 400,000 sacks of grain. He then cunningly asked for plenipotentiary fiscal powers, which were granted.

His immediate aim was rooting out corruption among 'monks' in religious houses. When Genghis foolishly granted sweeping tax exemptions to Chang Chun, the number of religious vocations, not surprisingly, increased dramatically. Yelu ended all the exemptions and decreed that all religious persons under fifty had to pass a stiff theological examination to prove their *bona fides*. Moreover, all monasteries which had used the Chang Chun laws to acquire land and engage in commerce were expressly forbidden to do so in future or to expand existing activities, while being heavily taxed on their current assets.[22]

Yelu then issued a manifesto, taking care to get Ogodei's immediate endorsement, which contained eighteen points relating to law and order, strong central government, clamping down on corruption and a strict division between military and civilian jurisdiction. He divided the country into ten administrative units, each one with a tax collection centre run by two mandarins recruited from enthusiastic ex-Jin personnel; these twenty tax officials answered directly to Ogodei so that they could not be overawed or browbeaten by greedy military officials. Yelu levied his main taxes on land, estimated by a household rating, and also collected impost on commerce, liquor, salt, vinegar, iron smelting and iron products.

Every adult had to pay a fixed tribute in silk yarn, with the rural population mulcted more highly than city-dwellers. A set amount of grain was levied for each household, regardless of the quality of land, with city-dwellers paying a supplementary levy in silk yarn; taxes in silk yarn were usually commuted into silver for payment to the government.

By September 1231 he was able to tell a delighted Ogodei that he had raised the exact amount (10,000 ingots of silver) he had promised in his original estimate. As a reward Ogodei gave him the title of chief of the Chinese secretariat, responsible for drafting rescripts, decrees and official documents plus the keeping of records. The secretariat also provided interpreters, envoys, astronomer-astrologers, economists and supervisors of military colonies. Yelu recruited a staff of officials writing in six languages: Mongolian, Chinese, Uighur, Jurchen, Persian and Tangut.

The Chinese hailed Yelu as their saviour. Yet his initial 'miracle-working' in China soon went sour. There were a number of reasons. Until 1234 and the final defeat of the Jin, the requirements of war meant that extra taxes were raised, over and above the 'official' ones. But the war itself produced famines, epidemics and displacement of population at the very time the Mongols were seeking these extra taxes. A kind of financial version of 'mission creep' meant that Yelu's initial 'reasonable' taxes increased anyway. By 1234 the land tax had been raised from two bushels of grain to four while the annual quota of silver was doubled.[24] And as if to confirm the old maxim that no good deed goes unpunished, there was grumbling that Yelu had not extended any of his much-vaunted reforms to the non-Chinese, especially those from Central Asia, living in China.

By the time of Ogodei's great quriltai in 1235, Yelu's problems had expanded to the point where he seemed a perfect Ishmael, with every man's hand turned against him. The Confucians and Buddhists, and the disciples of Chang Chun, had not taken his measures directed against monasteries and bogus monks lying down. The Confucian backlash was mild, as Yelu favoured them over rival religions and thought them more useful socially. (One of his maxims was 'Buddhism for the substance, Confucianism for the functions' – by which he meant that both religions on their own were inadequate: Confucianism because it did not pay enough attention to self-cultivation and the inner man, Buddhism because it ignored the everyday world and the practical concerns of here and now.)[25]

The Buddhists were most vociferous in their defiance. They rejected Yelu's idea of canonical tests for all monks, arguing that their religion was based on virtue not knowledge and that virtue could not be tested in an examination. This patently self-serving and disingenuous argument was sustained when the Buddhists got the support of the powerful Shigi Qutuqu, who agreed to reduce their theological examinations to a mere formality, with no provision for failure; because Shigi had enjoyed such favour with Genghis, Ogodei would never overrule him in favour of Yelu.[26]

In any case, Yelu had not really thought through the implications of his anti-monk policy, even if he had been given a free hand. Enforcement of his religious laws conflicted with his fundamental drive towards centralisation, as it would require a local bureaucracy. Now not only did such a body not exist but, if created and trained, it would be in competition with the khan's 'normal' officials.[27] Besides, religious commisars could come only from the native Chinese, and the Mongols were adamant that they should never be given unnecessary powers. The programme of sinicisation that Yelu liked to plug as his gift to China was largely an illusion, a congeries of ad hoc concessions granted by Ogodei cynically and pragmatically as a way to buy time.

Nevertheless, in 1235–36 Yelu was still hopeful. At the 1235 quriltai Ogodei accepted his proposal that a census be held in China to identify the missing taxpayers. Yelu had long argued that because of corruption which he could not control, there had been a massive flight from the land by the Chinese peasantry to avoid the burden of the household tax; some say as many as 50 per cent of the population of Jin China were tax evaders in this way.[28] Moreover, at this stage Chinqai was on Yelu's side and argued for more rigour and regularity in taxation throughout the empire and for sanctions to make people accept the new paper currency. Small traders still preferred to deal in coin and said that they did not trust a paper currency that had no expiry date. Chinqai wanted a new law to make refusal to accept the paper currency a capital offence, at the same level of gravity as forgery and counterfeiting; this was granted.[29]

Although Shigi Qutuqu had backed the Buddhists against Yelu, on the issue of the census, which Ogodei appointed him to conduct, he was at one with Yelu and considered erratic taxation a sign of Mongol backwardness.[30] Yelu wanted to keep his old household tax – somewhat

paradoxically in the light of his stress on the flight from the land – how Ogodei, Chinqai and the senior Mongols wanted a capitation tax so that no one could escape the fiscal net simply by absconding or migrating. The compromise reached resulted in both a poll tax – Yelu had argued against this, saying that having been registered on the census and forced to pay his year's taxes, the average adult male would simply abscond before the next annual payment came round – and a modified household tax. The new household tax, previously levied at an inelastic flat rate, was now assessed on the quality and quantity of land, roughly 10 per cent of income or harvest; nomads were taxed one animal in every hundred.[31] Yelu maintained that he had been right, as the new household tax raised only 10 per cent of the previous one, but Shigi and others hit back with the argument that the other 90 per cent was made up by the revenues collected from those who were 'invisible' before the census.

Yelu lost another argument when he asked Ogodei to stop his officials receiving 'gifts' (i.e. bribes), but Ogodei said the practice should remain as long as the officials did not ask for them or extort them.[32]

Thus far the arguments conducted after the census concerned the minutiae of taxation. But Yelu now learned to his horror that Ogodei's motive for the census had been to discover how much land he could distribute as further appanages to family and favourites. In other words, whereas Yelu's motives for the census had been for tax and administrative purposes, the Mongols simply wanted to know how many people would be on the land they intended to earmark for themselves.[33] Put technically, Ogodei aimed at the feudalisation of north China while Yelu aimed at its centralisation; the two principles were on a head-on collision course.

Realising that his officials would not be able to control these quasi-independent fiefdoms, in some desperation Yelu suggested a compromise: that his tax-collectors should be allowed to enter the appanages, collect taxes, compute them centrally and then redistribute a portion to the fief-holder. Ogodei gave formal approval for this, but never implemented it; his system of appanages in China therefore effectively destroyed Yelu's centralisation programme.[34]

This programme had never functioned perfectly anyway, if only because of the number of Jin renegades who had been rewarded for their services to the Mongols in the war. One such was Yen Shih who,

in defiance of Yelu's separation of civil and military powers in 1231–32, had been appointed both myriarch and chief administrator in his enclave of Tung-Ping. But if Yen Shih had survived Yelu's thrust for centralisation, he faced a real and imminent threat after 1236 because of the new appanages, which would have reduced him to a cipher. Ogodei's proposal for Tung-Ping was that it should be divided into ten sections and given to ten of his favourites. Yelu and Yen Shih were unlikely bedfellows but they came together in alliance in 1237 to oppose this move. Yelu wrote to Ogodei to remind him that he had received Yen Shih in audience in 1230 and held a great banquet in his honour; would not the present proposal be seen as treacherous ingratitude? Ogodei therefore decided not to proceed in this case, but warned that his generosity should not be read as a precedent.[35]

Perhaps to soothe Yelu's ruffled feathers, in the same year he agreed to his proposal for a meritocratic and competitive civil service examination, reviving the custom of the old Tang dynasty which was also currently practised among the Song. The astonishing aspect of this was that all literate denizens of China, even including slaves and prisoners of war, were allowed to take part; Yelu ordained severe penalties for the owners of enslaved scholars who tried to stop them sitting the exam.[36] There were 4,030 successful candidates, including more than 1,000 slaves, who thereby earned their freedom. Yelu found them jobs as councillors, where they were exempt from tax and *corvée*. Few of them, however, were given the really top positions their qualifications merited; the Mongols had no intention of allowing the Chinese to administer China and made sure all key positions went to Uighurs or personnel from the old Khwarezmian empire. In any case, having thrown this sop to Yelu, Ogodei changed tack; no competitive examinations were held thereafter.[37] Both the principle of promotion on merit and that of evaluating the authenticity of monks by formal tests perished together.

By the late 1230s Yelu was losing ground on all fronts. Four major opponents can be identified: the 'old Mongols', the military high command and local warlords; Muslim merchants; individuals within China and the administration who had the ear of the khan; and, to a certain extent, Ogodei himself in the latter part of his reign. The 'Old Mongols' were headed by Genghis's brothers Temuge and Belgutei in alliance with Subedei, who had not forgotten that Yelu talked Ogodei out of the wholesale sack of Kaifeng in 1233. All of these men loathed

Yelu and went out of their way to discredit him.[38] They alleged that China needed to be taxed more heavily to provide the surplus for financing the projected campaign in Europe; was a mere Khitan official and his parsimony to stand in the way of Mongol martial glory? Besides, it was not appropriate for a mere man of letters to hold high office in a military society; he knew nothing of the art of war and was a meddling fool who should be confined to the academy.[39] (This was one of the first recorded laments in history concerning the vexed question of 'the professor in politics' which so engaged twentieth-century analysts.) Most of all, they insinuated that he was 'soft on China', that he granted the Chinese taxation and other privileges contrary to the interests of the Mongol empire. Sometimes Yelu fell into this trap himself and alienated even the khan by his 'bleeding heart' pleas for the Chinese people. On one occasion an exasperated Ogodei asked him: 'Are you going to shed tears for the people again?'[40] Military commanders and Mongol oligarchs swelled the chorus of anti-Yelu propaganda, incensed that he stood between them and the acquisition of vast lands there. Some of the opposition of these groups to Yelu had a basis in military actuality, but most of it was simply frustrated greed.[41]

Yelu hit back in his dispatches to Ogodei by claiming that if the military were given their head in China, tax yields would plummet, not only because their rapacious demands would cause the peasants to flee the land but because the commanders, interested primarily in forage for their horses and cattle, would turn over huge tracts of agricultural land to grazing.[42] As for his supposed status as an obstacle to the European campaign, this issue arose solely because the Mongols were so poor at preparing estimates; they were always seeking to increase taxation simply to make up the shortfall in their budgets produced by incompetent accounting.[43]

Unable to defeat Yelu's arguments by logic and reason, in their frustration Genghis's brothers hatched a plot to assassinate him. Belgutei and Temuge were implicated, but the ringleader seems to have been Temuge. Ogodei's efficient intelligence service uncovered the plot. It was a huge embarrassment for Ogodei to have to punish his uncles, so he asked Yelu for his opinion on suitable retribution. He replied that he was not interested in revenge. Ogodei managed to avoid a family scandal by hushing up the incident but for a time it swayed him to Yelu's way of thinking. As a compromise on the vexed appanage issue, he decreed

that central government officials could enter these territories to secure the empire's rightful share of the taxes; any attempt to dissuade or turn them aside by bribery would be punished by death.[44]

The Muslim merchants were the proximate cause of Yelu's ultimate downfall. Throughout the 1230s their influence in China increased. They were organised via the *ortaq* (a Turkish word meaning 'partner') – an association of officially licensed merchants in partnership with the Mongol elite for the purposes of personal enrichment.[45] Hugely unpopular in China on a number of counts – they were foreigners, alien in culture and language, they were corrupt and exploitative and ruthless when used as tax-collectors by the government – these Islamic plutocrats were the enemy of a peaceful, organised, well-administered China. Taxes made to the Mongol court in silver were typically invested with these merchants who lent it out at usurious rates.[46] Often they would borrow from the Mongols and then reloan the money at an interest rate of 100 per cent, and they found takers because of the high cost of living in north China in an era of war, famine and natural disasters and the steep level of taxation. The Muslims converted the 100 per cent interest payments into capital each year, so that after ten years the principal and compound interest amounted to 1,000 times the original loan.[47] The *ortaq* repaid this original loan at an interest rate high enough to satisfy Ogodei, so that, when they proposed raising additional revenue through tax farming, he was receptive.

In vain did Yelu warn the khan that tax farming would weaken central government and geld the secretariat. By 1238 the annual tax quota for China was already 22,000 ingots of silver, and he warned that if this was doubled, as proposed by the merchants, peasants would turn to violent crime, murder of government officials, highway robbery and banditry.[48] Ogodei paid no attention to the warning. Though not interested in money per se, he derived the gambler's pleasure from winning and the associated feeling of power. He had dabbled in the speculative market from the early 1230s and, when the entire annual tax yield from China was a lowly 10,000 ingots of silver, invested 500 ingots of his own. As a modern historian has said, 'with monies leaving the treasury at this rate, it was not surprising that there was always pressure to readjust the tax quotas upward.'[49]

Finally, in 1239, Ogodei sold the pass completely, approved tax farming

and doubled the tax quota from 22,000 ingots to 44,000. While all this was making his life a nightmare, Yelu faced continuing opposition from Mongol oligarchs, other officials appointed by Ogodei and even from within his own secretariat. Shigi Qutuqu and Chinqai, much better politicians than Yelu, had originally tried to hold the ring, with Chinqai protecting Yelu from the merchants and Shigi from the wrath of the old Mongols. Once they sensed that Yelu was losing favour with Ogodei, they jumped on the bandwagon and began to sabotage him. Three of Chinqai's protégés, Qadaq, who had done most of the work on the census under the nominal direction of Shigi, Mahmud Yalavach and the tax-farmer Abd al-Rahman, would all be instrumental in the anti-Yelu campaign in 1239.

Other powerful opponents of Yelu inside China included his fellow Khitan Shih-mo Hsien-te-pu, who had defected from the Jin as early as 1212 and was a particular favourite with Ogodei and Chinqai (Shih-mo was a senior figure under Yelu in the secretariat) and Buyruq Qaya, an Uighur who had originally been one of Genghis's bodyguards but in the 1230s performed important functions in China as Ogodei's extraordinary envoy.[51]

Finally, Ogodei himself lost confidence in Yelu. The khan was always personally fond of him but, particularly after 1235, when Ogodei's alcoholism became dominant, he seems to have lost interest in protecting him. Yet in the early years there was a powerful rapport. Hearing that Yelu (in an uncanny echo of Pliny the Elder of whom he had certainly never heard) had declared that the daytime was for government service and the evening for study, Ogodei insisted that when Yelu came to court he had to take part in drinking sessions. Once Yelu got badly drunk at a palace reception and crept into a carriage to sleep it off. Ogodei noticed him there and shook him awake. Bleary-eyed and half asleep, Yelu did not recognise the khan and responded with some angry imprecations. Finally he realised who he was dealing with, jumped up in fright and apologised. Ogodei laughed heartily, said: 'Oh, so you prefer to imbibe in secret and get drunk alone rather than enjoy yourself with us,' and went away chortling.[52]

As the decade wore on, Ogodei began to have second thoughts. We can only guess at his motivation. It may be that Ogodei came to despise his minister after Yelu said he wanted no vengeance for the

assassination plot against him, for with the Mongols revenge was a sacred duty. It may be that as Ogodei progressively withdrew from politics and national affairs, becoming a kind of Tiberius with Karakorum as his Capri, he began to find Yelu tiresome. Or perhaps, like Napoleon with the failed candidates for the marshalate, he simply concluded that Yelu was unlucky and had made too many enemies. The simplest explanation is that Yelu got in the way of the khan's enjoyment at making a killing with the Muslim merchants.[53] Attracted by Abd al-Rahman's plan to double the tax quota, in 1239 Ogodei gave him a contract for tax farming and sacked Yelu, who was allowed to retain his titles and his position as court astrologer but was no longer consulted on affairs of state. At the same time Ogodei transferred Mahmud Yalavach from Turkestan to China as his senior administrator there.

The years 1239–41 were nightmare years for the Chinese peasantry, as al-Rahman and his minions ran amok. A popular scam was to borrow money from Ogodei, buy up merchandise and then claim it had been stolen so that the locality in which the 'theft' occurred had to make good the losses (in some cases this led to an effective quadrupling of taxation, as happened between 1238 and 1239).[54] By 1241 even Ogodei had had enough of the rampant corruption, so he got rid of al-Rahman, abolished tax farming and returned to Yelu's system, without restoring the man himself.[55]

Chinqai meanwhile had brought charges of defalcation against Yelu, supported by the circumstantial evidence of corruption among some of his tax-collectors.[56] All this was subsumed in the power struggle at the top after Ogodei's death in December 1241. Once again Yelu backed the wrong horse at court, was disgraced and died in 1244, worn out and saddened by the death of his wife earlier the same year – some say, just in time, before his enemies murdered him.[57]

The regent Toregene brought back Abd al-Rahman for another reign of extortion in 1243–46. In a sense, though, Yelu had the last laugh. Chinqai came to regret bitterly his alliance with the Muslim merchants. Mahmud Yalavach and Chinqai were disgraced and had to flee for protection to Ogodei's second son Koden to escape the regent's wrath. And in a final irony most of Yelu's programme for China was carried out in the reign of Qubilai Khan.[58] A highly talented individual who could transcend petty limitations and provide a

Solomonic view of empire, Yelu was a genuine man for all seasons; his tragedy was that his one fatal flaw was his lack of ability as a politician.

Despite his profligacy on falconry, hunting, gambling and the generosity of his arbitrary handouts, Ogodei still had a huge surplus to spend from the income from his investments. Some of it he devoted to building a permanent Mongol capital, which he felt the empire required, even though he himself, like his father, preferred to live in a ger. Genghis, on his return from the Khwarezmian campaign, had set up a permanent headquarters on the banks of the River Orkhon, comprising thousands of tents and carts, and instructed his brother Temuge to plan a proper capital. The upper Orkhon was considered a significant area for a number of reasons: commercial, strategic, ideological. The site of Karakorum had been a summer pasture for the Kereit, and there had been a Buddhist temple there in the era of the Liao dynasty.[59]

Genghis died before this could be achieved, but Ogodei took up the baton and built the town of Karakorum, completed in 1235. Here at last the huge number of artisans and craftsmen made prisoner on the various campaigns came into their own, as hitherto the Mongols had used them mainly for the routine shoring up of their own primitive technology. Craftsmen made stirrups and sighting devices for their crossbows, blacksmiths shod horses, tanners cured furs and made leather goods, saddles and harnesses, carpenters fashioned bows and arrows, saddle frames, wagons and gers, plus the staves that held up the nomads' felt tents.[60]

Some of these captives with special skills were female. A woman from Metz (in what is now France), unlucky enough to be in Hungary when the Mongols invaded, knew how to build luxury tents, so she was taken back to Mongolia to ply her skills instead of being butchered – her most likely fate if she had been unskilled.[61] For these prisoners the construction of Karakorum, and especially the palaces therein, opened new vistas. The best of them were summoned from the four corners of the realm, and especially from Chagatai's seat at Beshbaliq and from the 'city of craftsmen' called Kemkemjek on the north-west of the Mongolian plateau, patronised by Tolui's wife. Several thousand captive families lived here, mainly Chinese and

Muslims from Turkestan, specialising in metalwork, producing weapons and agricultural implements.[62] The Mongol prince Buri (son of Mogetugen and grandson of Chagatai) also brought back from Europe a number of German goldminers and ensconced them at his court near Talas (Taraz), 170 miles north-east of modern Tashkent.[63]

The significance of the location of Karakorum was that it was situated on the shortest route from Mongolia to Transoxiana and Persia – on the east–west line of communication that ran along the northern slopes of the Tien Shan Mountains.[64] There were two distinct quarters in the town, a Muslim ghetto and a Chinatown where merchants and craftsmen lived. Ogodei wanted his capital to symbolise 'inclusiveness', pointing up the way the Mongols drew inspiration from both China and Islam. Everyone who wrote about the Mongols had something to say about Karakorum, though most agreed it was no more than a glorified village; Rubruck indeed remarked that the Parisian suburb of St Denis was more impressive.[65]

Karakorum was nevertheless a thriving town with four gates, though it was not completed until the reign of Mongke. The town walls were four miles in extent and the main streets were arranged north–south and east–west in a grid pattern, with a total absence of rich and poor areas, since official residences could be found next to mean houses and temples next to workshops. It had the peculiarity that the four gates were assigned to four different kinds of trade: at the east gate millet and grain were sold, at the west gate sheep and goats, at the north horses and at the south oxen and carts.[66]

Far the most striking thing about the town and its environs were the twelve temples, each representing a different denomination, and the palaces built for Ogodei and his immediate family. On the eastern bank of the Orkhon Ogodei ordered a Chinese bureaucrat named Liu Ming to oversee the building of his own palace, to be called Wanangong ('Ten Thousand Tranquillities').[67] Completed in a year, Wanangong palace had walls nine feet high, 240 feet long and 150 feet wide. There were nine lines of pillars from south to north and eight lines from east to west (seventy-two in all). According to Rubruck it had three great doors on the southern side. At the northern end was the seat of the great khan, with two stairways leading up to the throne. On the right side of the emperor were the seats of the princes and on the left those of the queens and imperial concubines. Outside the

palace, in front of the middle door, stood a large silver 'beverage tree' (said to have been built for Ogodei by a goldsmith from the West), at the foot of which were four silver lions, each with a pipe dispensing drinks.[68] Inside the trunk of the tree four pipes, connected to different vats of liquid, led up to the top, and the ends of the pipes were bent over and downwards in the shape of a gilded serpent whose tail twisted around the trunk of the tree; the pipes poured out different drinks – rice wine, clear mare's milk and a kind of red wine which visitors likened to the highly esteemed La Rochelle wine of France. In the grounds of the palace Ogodei liked to stage musical shows with jugglers, jesters, actors and dancers and to watch his favourite spectator sport: wrestling.[70] Visitors described an atmosphere of hedonism, revelry and drunkenness, with the khan well to the fore when he was in residence.

But as a true nomad Ogodei liked to be constantly on the move. A twelve-month study of his movements in 1235–36 reveals the following. He was in Karakorum until April 1235, then in the lakes and marshes of the River Orkhon until late May. He returned briefly to Karakorum only to depart for the mountains to the south-east. At the end of August he moved to his hunting lodge and winter residence on the Ongiin River to the south, where he stayed until returning to Karakorum in February 1236.[71] If in its juxtaposition of the modern and traditional perhaps Karakorum resembled most a city like Asunción, capital of modern Paraguay, as an artificial construct it was the Brasilia of its day, and the city had to be supplied daily with five hundred camel loads of food and merchandise; it was said that Ogodei had limited tolerance for the hustle and bustle of Karakorum.[72]

Ogodei once told his confidants that, of all his achievements, the thing he was most proud of was his fast courier service or yam.[73] Although Genghis had inaugurated the system of carrying intelligence by fast mounted couriers, it was Ogodei who perfected it, leaving his successors to improve the quantity rather than the quality. Most of the best data about the yam comes from the reign of Qubilai, as it was one of the things that most impressed Marco Polo. Each staging post held fresh horses and couriers as well as its own grain, cattle, other animals and wells. Ogodei considered he had done well by establishing thirty-seven posts between China just south of the Wall and Karakorum, but by the time of Qubilai this had expanded to

10,000 posts and 200,000 horses in his section of the empire alone; the yam was always a more important part of life in China, and therefore more efficiently run, than it ever was in Persia.[74]

Technically, the express courier system was divided into four segments, the *tayan* yam, relating to what we would nowadays call the diplomatic bag or pouch, the *narin* yam, for secret agents and military personnel, the *tergen* yam (stations with wagons) and the *narin* yam (simple horse stations).[75] Depending on the terrain, the distance between post stations varied: it could be as great as forty miles or as little as ten. By contrast, the Pony Express network, operated in the USA between April 1860 and October 1861 between St Joseph, Missouri and Sacramento, California until it was made obsolete by the telegraph, had its stations dotted at ten-mile intervals over 157 stations.[76] Famously the Pony Express advertised for riders as follows: 'Wanted. Young, skinny, wiry fellows not over eighteen. Must be expert riders willing to risk death daily. Orphans preferred.' But where even such prodigies of youth and endurance were expected to ride a maximum of one hundred miles a day, the Mongol equivalent – young men weighing no more than 125 pounds – had to be prepared for journeys of up to 250 miles a day. Each station had to have two hundred horses ready for use – hard riding limited each horse to about ten miles – and another two hundred grazing on a monthly rotational basis, and each station was inspected monthly.[77] As the couriers approached each post, they announced their arrival with bells, so that the locals could make all ready. If a journey had to be continued by night and there was no moon, runners went ahead of the mounted couriers with torches and flambeaux to show the way to the next post.[78]

The entire yam service was a testament to Mongol discipline and efficiency but, because the Mongols were so proud of it, they soon began to circulate tall tales about it. While it is possible to believe that some couriers possessed of great stamina could cover a distance of 1,300 miles with only brief rests, the claim that their torch-bearing runners could cover 160 miles in twenty-four hours strains credulity in the light of times clocked up by modern marathon runners.[79]

By the late 1230s Ogodei was linked by super-fast courier service with all important Mongol princes and oligarchs and could communicate with men like Chagatai and Batu in a matter of days. In theory,

only people on official business and bearing a *paiza* or tablet were allowed to use the yam service. The tablet was an official pass of wood, silver and gold, engraved in the Uighur script. The Mongol army was in charge of the service, but the costs were largely dumped onto the peasantry, who had to bear the expense of accommodating couriers and providing forage for horses; only where the posts were too far from trunk roads did the khan 'graciously' consent to foot some part at least of the bill. A particular millstone for local inhabitants were the official messengers or couriers (*elchi*) who could requisition horses for themselves and their escorts and had carte blanche to behave in an arrogant and high-handed manner. Because these officials could also commandeer caravans, bandits often disguised themselves as *elchi*.[80]

The strain on the peasantry can be gauged by one simple fact: in China 750,000 households or 6 per cent of the population were in some way connected with the yam. The penalties for non-compliance with the requirements of the system, as indeed for failure to provide any kind of labour service or pay taxes, were severe. Non-payers had their wives and children taken away while serious offenders, including those whose families had fled to avoid abduction, were chained and tortured; if the absconding families were found, they were instantly executed.[81] But the draconian penalties did not stop the flight from the fields, which soon became an epidemic, and military campaigns were threatened because of the absence of taxpayers and, hence, funds.

Ambassadors and merchants were allowed to use the yam free under Genghis and Ogodei, and the system was widely abused, with the principals taking along their family, friends and in some cases escorts of 200–300 men on relatively trivial missions (or up to a thousand on important ones).[82] There was also a lot of covert grumbling that the peasantry had to pay for fripperies and indulgences, such as Ogodei's taste for fresh fruit, ordered by the khan from faraway parts but carried by the couriers at great speed. Because of this widespread corruption, in the 1250s Mongke introduced charges for all personnel. By this time the yam had become the focus for new settlements. Because horses, stock, water and food supplies provided the nucleus for colonisation, entire towns sprang up around what had once been lonely frontier posts.[83] Moreover since the yam had, right from the

days of Genghis Khan, played a key part in Mongol intelligence and espionage, it became a multifaceted institution, satisfying more and increasingly complex demands as the empire expanded. Thus the yam fulfilled an important role in enabling what were originally primitive livestock breeders to maintain their sway for 150 years over the oldest and most populous civilisations of Asia.[84]

By the late 1230s the problems of the Mongol empire were becoming so complex and intricate that it would have needed a Philip II of Spain, working an 18-hour day, to cope with them. Ogodei did not even spend one hour a day on affairs of state, but increasingly retreated into a narcissistic round of dalliances, gambling and, especially, drinking. His consumption of alcohol, always great, became prodigious.[85] Chagatai warned him to cut down and seems to have brought maximum pressure to bear, for Ogodei agreed to cut his consumption in half and issued a decree that his servants should in future bring him only half his normal number of cups of wine; he then secretly ordered that the wine be served to him in vessels twice the size, so that he kept the letter of his promise to his brother but not the spirit.[86]

To say that alcohol contributed to the eventual decline of the Mongol empire risks making the historian sound like a temperance enthusiast or Edward Gibbon in one of his wilder moments, but it is a fact that once they gained access to the finer wines of the wider world, Mongol aristocrats tended to die young of obesity and cirrhosis and to suffer from gout – the khans Guyuk and Mongke were also notorious topers – and this was particularly marked among the women. Some even allege that alcoholism affected Mongol fertility in the period after Qubilai.[87]

While Ogodei was in his cups, a ferocious power struggle, with one eye on the succession, raged between various factions at court: between conservatives and progressives over the future governance of the empire (this was the draught in which Yelu Chu Cai was caught); between the descendants of Ogodei and the rival descendants of Tolui; among the princes, aristocrats and potentates, often with personal grievances which they aired at Karakorum; and even within Ogodei's own family.[88] Ogodei's first choice of successor was Kochu, his third son, but he died in 1236 on campaign in China. His next choice was his grandson Shiremun, Kochu's eldest son, but he was insufficiently assertive and Ogodei usually too intoxicated to impose his candidacy.

Koden, the second son, who had been Genghis's choice to succeed Ogodei, was generally considered too sickly to be a serious candidate; Ogodei's wife Toregene meanwhile was lobbying and scheming hard to get her favourite son Guyuk promoted to the khanate, even though his health was not particularly robust.[90]

Meanwhile, there was even a faction of Nestorian Christians who wanted to make their religion the official ideology and were angered at Ogodei's partiality for Islam.[91] This was, as the saying goes, a step that had already departed, for the empire was already showing clear signs of east–west bifurcation: Buddhism in the East and Islam in the West. Such was the predilection for Islam in the West that in Iran and elsewhere an informal deal was hammered out to allow the Yasa to coexist with sharia. And the great khan of the Ilkhans, Hulagu, actually sought and in 1258 obtained from the caliph a fatwa to state that his rule was legitimate.[92]

In these great struggles the clear winners were Toregene (over the successions) and the Mongol princes, who obtained their desired appanages in China.[93] But before any of the issues could be finally resolved, Ogodei suddenly died in December 1241. The received opinion is that he succumbed to alcoholic excess but there is much circumstantial evidence that he was poisoned, and this is the conclusion reached by Rashid al-Din. There were any number of possible motives for poisoning, but the closesness of the Ogodei and Chagatai clans suggests that the perpetrator was aiming at that particular power nexus.[94] Further circumstantial evidence comes from the death of Chagatai soon afterwards (in 1242) and the even more mysterious death of Koden sometime in 1246–48. The official line was that Chagatai was killed in a hunting accident when he was wounded by a recoiling arrow, but it is suggested that this is no more than wishful thinking by his Islamist enemies.[95]

Ogodei was buried in his personal appanage of Dzungaria, not at Genghis' (pretended) burial site on Burqan Qaldun. He left behind a grove to grow for his soul and ordered that anyone who so much as cut a twig from it was to be flogged mercilessly.[96] Thus departed a great figure in Mongol history. As part of his legacy he left what was probably the Mongols' greatest single exploit: the conquest of Russia and eastern Europe.

16

The Invasion of Eastern Europe

In 1235 Ogodei held a great quriltai on the slopes of Mount Dalan-Daba ('the seventy passes') in Mongolia.[1] The khan, who if he had known anything of the Romans would have approved of their motto *festina lente* ('make haste slowly') spent a leisurely month, alternating carousing with meetings of his grand council. Finally he announced that, with the wars against Jalal al-Din, Jin China and Korea all successfully completed, the next target for the Mongols would be Russia and eastern Europe; on the list of those to be definitively subdued were the Cumans, the Volga Bulgars, the Russians, all the peoples of the Crimea, and the Hungarians.[2]

This decision has usually been considered to have been prompted either by mindless glory-hunting or the Mongols' sense of their 'manifest destiny' that impelled them to world conquest in accordance with the wishes of the great god Tengerri. In fact it was more prosaically based. As more and more Mongol princes, begotten as a result of Genghis's policy of intermarriage, reached adulthood, they demanded the wealth and privileges, the lands and appanages of the previous generation. These aspirations had to be satisfied or a dangerous pre-civil war situation would arise. Since Siberia was a frozen wasteland, and the subcontinent of India much too hot for Mongol tastes, that left just two possibilities: expansion south into Song China or expansion west to Russia.

Ogodei fully intended to press ahead with the conquest of southern China but he was aware of the difficulties – principally that the Mongols had not yet gained the necessary experience of riverine and maritime warfare[3] – and thought of it as a longer-term project. But in the West there was no obvious obstacle, as Jebe and Subedei's great raid of 1221–23 had demonstrated. It was time to put flesh on the bones of the

famous boast about the westward boundary of Jochi's ulus – 'as far as our horses' hooves can travel' – and ascertain just how far that was.

Ogodei was aware that the conquest of Russia and Europe was the greatest and most ambitious the Mongols had ever undertaken. Relatively speaking, both the Jin realm and the empire of Khwarezmia were on Mongolia's doorstep, but in this case Ogodei's armies would be operating at least 8,000 miles from their home base, with all the massive logistical and commissariat problems such huge distances would engender.[4] Always circumspect, Ogodei planned for the great adventure painstakingly – it is possible that it was the administrative strain of working out the enterprise to the last detail that wore him out and made him determined on a life of pure pleasure thereafter.

The most basic thing was to ensure a steady supply of horses, beasts of burden and 'meat on the hoof'. Additional taxes were decreed. Because of an empire-wide shortage of horses by 1233, the previous levy of one horse in every hundred in private hands was raised to the very steep one in ten, and a new tax in cattle of one in every hundred was instituted.[5]

Between 120,000 and 130,000 troops were assembled; Ogodei ordered that every ulus, appanage, town and city had to contribute men. Batu, son of Jochi, was given supreme command of the expedition and assigned 4,000 elite Mongol troops – his 'Immortals' or Old Guard – as the core of his force. More Mongols joined him from the four corners of the realm but most of the rest of the soldiers were Turks, and questions were raised at the quriltai about their loyalty and reliability. However, they were well trained and disciplined and Ogodei, a shrewd judge, had confidence in them, rightly, as it turned out.[6]

Although Batu was titular commander, as the brains of the entire operation Ogodei relied on the 59-year-old Subedei, by 1235 a hardened veteran of dozens of campaigns. Both Genghis and Ogodei had had their doubts about Subedei on the grounds that he was a military prima donna who did not collaborate with other commanders but, until 1232, he had a powerful champion in Tolui, the one member of the Mongol royal family with a true appreciation of the older man's gifts. Instancing the very successful collaboration with Jebe in 1221–23, Tolui argued that the problem was not that Subedei was a prima donna but that he could not suffer military fools gladly; he esteemed and respected Jebe, another military genius, but had only contempt for Genghis's overpromoted favourites like Shigi Qutuqu. Ogodei,

who adored his brother Tolui, listened to the eulogy and was eventually won round.[7]

The omens for a successful collaboration this time were perhaps not propitious. Batu seems to have been a divisive figure, not without ability but hardly a Jebe or a Muqali. The Franciscan Carpini, who observed him closely in 1245, recorded this verdict: 'Batu is kindly towards his own men, nevertheless he is greatly feared by them; in battle he is the most cruel of men, very shrewd and also extremely cunning in war, for he has now been fighting for many years.'[8] Sadly, we lack a proper physical description of the future khan of the Golden Horde, for Rubruck remarked only that Batu was 'about the height of my lord John of Beaumont' – which drew from a Russian historian the following sardonic comment: 'It is a pity we have not had the honour of knowing M. de Beaumont.'[9] Other notable Mongol grandees who joined the expedition were Berke, Shiban and Orda, Batu's brothers; Orda, as the eldest of Jochi's sons, should have had precedence over Batu but all the sources describe him as a military lightweight, lacking in personal gravitas.[10]

Also present were Mongke and Bujek (Tolui's son), Baidar and Buri (son and grandson of Chagatai), Ogodei's sons Guyuk and Qadan and his grandson Qaidu, and Subedei's son Uriankhadai. It was meant to be a glittering array of all the talents, emphasising that this conquest was a major effort by the entire empire and that all its resources were being harnessed;[11] it was certainly an impressive turnout, containing two future great khans and two future khans of the Golden Horde. Ogodei had originally wanted to command the host in person, but he was dissuaded by Mongke at the quriltai.[12]

It was typical of Ogodei – and it showed him to be a true son of Genghis – that he masked his ultimate intentions by sending a perfunctory raiding expedition to Sind in 1236, to keep potential targets of the mighty expeditionary host guessing as to his true intentions. It may have been as a result of this probe, which seemed to portend invasion, or the series of stiff notes Ogodei had sent the Delhi sultan about his indulgence of Jalal al-Din in the 1220s, that obliged the sultan to make a token submission to the Mongols.[13] At any rate, the last possible uncertainty on the Mongol flank had been removed, and Chormaqan had secured all strategic objectives south of the Caucasus.

Ogodei's first task was to eliminate the Volga Bulgars and the Cumans

as a military factor. The Mongols were initially angry with the Cumans for two reasons: they had given shelter to the Merkit and sided with shah Muhammad.[14] War had dragged on between the Mongols and the Cumans from 1216 to 1229, most intensively during the great raid by Subedei and Jebe in 1221–23, but the Mongols had failed to deliver a knockout blow; it was the same story with the Volga Bulgars.[15]

In 1229 Ogodei sent out Subedei on a campaign against both these gadflies; he defeated their combined forces in the Urals north of the Caspian and sacked the town of Saqsin on the lower reaches of the Volga but did not follow up his victory; as this was most untypical of him, one must presume it was because he had received orders summoning him back to the front in China.[16] The best he was able to achieve was to enrol some of the defeated Cumans into the Mongol army, though the majority fled west. Even while he dealt the Jin a mortal blow, Ogodei continued to send forces into the steppe (three tumens under Batu in 1232) to harry both Bulgars and Cumans, but although the Mongols laid waste vast swathes of territory and did massive damage to landscape and property, they ran into unexpectedly stiff opposition on the battlefield, and little was achieved.

Ogodei was irritated by the lack of progress made in this theatre but he underrated the difficulties of pacifying such a numerous people; only when he committed huge forces to the task in 1235 did it become feasible.[17] After the quriltai Ogodei took Subedei aside and made him personally responsible for the final subjugation or extermination of both Cumans and Bulgars.

The Mongol army moved out westwards, Batu and his brothers forming the vanguard and departing in late 1235; Subedei and the main force followed in February–March 1236.[18] The entire force rendezvoused on the borders of the Volga Bulgars' territory; at last Subedei had the numbers to deal decisively with this arrogant foe who had singed his beard in 1222. His revenge was terrible. Commanding perhaps 40,000 men against an enemy force of 50,000, he caught the Bulgars at Bolgar on the Volga (south of its confluence with the Kama) in autumn 1236 and routed them; the slaughter was terrific.[19] Then he destroyed the Bulgar capital, thus ending the Bulgars' role as middlemen in the trade between northern Europe and Central Asia. Some of the Bulgars fled west for refuge with the Russian principalities. Two important Bulgar chiefs initially submitted, then rebelled, calling down massive retalia-

tion.[20] The Mongols systematically destroyed any possible rallying point in their rear, sacking the Bulgar towns of Bilyar, Bolgar, Kenek, Zhukotin and Suvar. All tribes from the Urals to the Volga – Chermisi, Bashkirs, Mordvinians, Burtasi, Saksinians, Ossetians were conquered or submitted.[21] All these tribes became vassals of the Golden Horde. Subedei obediently followed Genghis's original instructions and handed over the territory to Jochi's sons; Orda received the land between the Irtysh and the Urals while Batu got the greater prize of the western steppe and the (as yet unconquered) Russian principalities.[22] There was little left of the Volga Bulgars: four-fifths of them were said to have perished in the devastating Mongol campaign.[23]

As soon as he had defeated the Bulgars at Bolgar, Subedei detached part of his army and assigned it to the younger commanders, with orders to search out and destroy the Cumans while he mopped up in Volga Bulgar country. He considered it important to 'blood' all his charges (Batu and his brothers, Mongke, Buri, Qadan and so on) before the invasion of Russia; each was given a separate assignment against different sub-tribes of the Cumans.[24] The Cumans, just as formidable as the Bulgars, were shamanists whereas the Volga Bulgars were Muslims.[25]

Although the Mongols devastated their territory, they were massively inconvenienced by the guerrilla warfare waged by the most intelligent Cuman chief, Bachman. Mongke, the future Great Khan, directed operations against him, making spectacularly effective use of the battue tactics on which he had been weaned. Mongke, with Bujek as his deputy, used a flotilla of two hundred huge river boats, said to contain one hundred men each. This armada cruised the Volga, inspecting the forests on both banks and gradually tightening the ring on Bachman.[26]

An advanced detachment combing overland found evidence of a recently abandoned camp. The Mongols met an old woman who told them that Bachman was holed up on a nearby island. The detachment had no boats with which to cross to the island but, seemingly miraculously, a high wind suddenly arose and lowered the level of the river, allowing the Mongols to ford across.[27] Once landed on the island, they achieved complete surprise and butchered the Cumans where they stood guard; one of them managed to raise the alarm but in the scramble to escape most of those in the encampment drowned in the Volga. The Mongols captured Bachman and bore him in triumph to Mongke, who

was jubilant when he heard about the 'wind miracle': 'Heaven has opened my way,' he exclaimed. Mongke then ordered Bachman to kneel before him, but the Cuman chief refused. 'I have myself been a king and do not fear death,' he said. 'I am not a camel that I should kneel.' He also taunted the Mongols by saying that their men left on his island would be trapped there when the waters rose. The enraged Mongke ordered Bujek to cut him in two with a giant sword.[29]

With the Cumans brought to heel, by autumn 1237 there were no potential enemies left east of Russia. The Cumans, though, had not quite been finished off, and it would take another campaign in 1239 before the Mongols finally gave them the *coup de grâce*. Once again the Mongols' greater discipline and the disunity of their foes had handed them the advantage. One estimate is that there were 600,000 Cumans on the steppes. If we assume one-tenth of that figure as warriors – and this is a very conservative figure given the crossover between pastoralists and warriors – the Cumans could have fielded an army of at least 60,000; such a host, if united, could even have conquered Russia. But, fatally for them, the various clans and factions among the Cumans could never make common cause.[30]

Batu and Subedei now began their invasion of Russia, first targeting the eastern and northern principalities. Although the Russians had had at least a year's warning of grave danger on their eastern borders, they had done nothing, perhaps thinking the Mongol–Cuman clash was some kind of civil war within the domains of their old enemy the Polovtsians. In many ways the prelude to the great Russian invasion of 1237–40 was uncannily like the run-up to Subedei and Jebe's great raid fifteen years earlier, with the period 1223–37 a carbon copy of 1200–22. The same petty factionalism, complacency and lack of interest in the interlopers' identity on display in the earlier period was repeated.[31]

If there was any beneficiary in the Russian power struggles of 1223–37 it was Suzdalia which, significantly, had taken no part in the great defeat at Kalka. Novgorod was the cockpit for conflict in northern Russia, and the key puppet-master was Yuri of Suzdalia, Grand Prince of Vladimir.[32] Novgorod was the scene both of princely faction and of acute conflicts within the boyar class. Meanwhile in southern Russia Daniel Romanovich of Galicia and Volhynia, the princes of Smolensk and Michael of Chernigov were locked in a struggle for control of Kiev. Finally, in 1235 the turmoil in the south erupted in a great civil war; between 1235 and

1240 the city of Kiev changed hands seven times. The upshot was that southern Russia was exhausted, with Suzdalia and Novgorod emerging as the most powerful states in the land of Rus, though Novgorod was beginning to be threatened from the west, both from predatory German merchants and Catholic missionaries wanting to convert the Livonian tribes to the western form of Christianity.[34]

Quite why the princes of Smolensk, Chernigov and Galicia acted like this despite a terrible threat looming from the east is a moot point: it has been variously explained as greed, mindless ambition and just plain stupidity. It was certainly self-destructive folly, as it is estimated that a united Russia could have fielded at least 100,000 troops, if all major cities and the Polovtsians contributed to the levy.[35] But it meant that any chance of a united Russian front against the Mongols was vain. Batu and Subedei could pick off the principalities at their leisure, even enjoying the (for the Mongols) unusual pleasure of local superiority in numbers. The Russians had no central command, no liaison between cities and, crucially, no credible system of intelligence and espionage and thus no knowedge of the Mongols' advanced siege techniques; their clash with the Mongols was a classic of amateur versus professional.

Meanwhile Batu and Subedei decided, rightly, to strike at the most powerful opponent first. Displaying his usual improvisatory genius, Subedei elected to strike in the depth of winter, when frozen rivers meant that horses could cross on the ice and supplies and materiel could be conveyed easily by sledge.[36] Catching the Russians completely off balance by his winter campaign, Subedei was about to succeed where Napoleon and Hitler would later fail.

The Mongols' first target was Ryazan, about 200 miles south-east of Moscow. This was held by the princes of Ryazan, Roman and his brother Yuri. The princes foolishly rejected Subedei's 'surrender or die' demand (the surrender to be accompanied by a tithe of the city's wealth) and sent frantically for help to Yuri of Vladimir. Subedei opened the siege on 16 December 1237 and methodically surrounded the town with a palisade. After five days Ryazan fell, and the usual massacre ensued. Roman by now had walled himself in Kolomna, halfway to Moscow, but Yuri of Vladimir, along with his wife and family, was taken and executed.[37] Yuri did send reinforcements but they had barely started their journey when they learned that Ryazan had fallen. One of the medieval Russian chroniclers lamented its downfall:

They burned this holy city with all its beauty and wealth . . . And churches of God were destroyed and much blood was spilled on the holy altars. And not one man remained alive in the city. All were dead . . . And there was not even anyone to mourn the dead.[38]

Reinforcements were sent to Roman too, and again they arrived too late, for Kolomna was taken and gutted, the Mongols' fury being accentuated by the death of Genghis's son Kolgen (by his favourite wife Qulan) during the siege. Roman himself was killed in the fighting and Kolomna remained a ruin for decades.[39]

The Mongols next advanced on Moscow, then an insignificant town, defeated Vladimir, one of Grand Duke Yuri's sons, sacked Moscow and then proceeded to take another fourteen towns in a lightning campaign.[40] One or two towns held out for a few days at most. Finally it was the turn of the capital, Vladimir, which had been left in charge of Yuri's sons Vsevolod and Mstislav; this succumbed after an eight-day assault. Batu erected a palisade around the town before bringing up scaling ladders and catapults. On the morning of 7 February he launched a massive attack, the defences were broken into in four places and by noon most of the serious fighting was over. The garrison in the citadel held out for another twenty-four hours. The rest of the resistance, including refugees and all female members of Prince Yuri's family, took refuge in the Cathedral of the Assumption, which they foolishly thought of as sanctuary (as if the Mongols understood the customs of European Christianity) and where they perished in the flames as it was burnt down around them, or were butchered when trying to escape the inferno. The surrender of the garrison led to its inevitable massacre.[41]

Finally the Mongols ran Grand Prince Yuri himself to earth at the River Sit' (a tributary of the Mologa) on 4 March 1238. The lacklustre Yuri was trying to make contact with his brother's army, had prepared no contingency plans in the event of being intercepted by the Mongols and, not surprisingly, was heavily defeated; he himself joined the growing roster of royal Russian casualties and perhaps he was glad to die, given that his entire family had perished, most of them in the conflagration at Vladimir. The Mongols claimed they had executed him, but the truth was that the Russians panicked and Yuri's generals callously beheaded him in the hopes that this sacrificial victim would delay the inevitable Mongol pursuit. Yuri's title of Grand Duke was taken over by his brother Yaroslav, who left his ruling position in Kiev and ceded the city to Michael of Chernigov.[42]

At this stage the Mongols divided their forces to effect a huge sweep through northern Russia and crush any remaining pockets of defiance. Batu took a north-easterly track while Subedei headed north-west, into the territory of Novgorod. The city of Novgorod itself was an obvious magnet for the Mongols because of its plethora of artisans: shoemakers, silversmiths, leather workers, tanners, coppersmiths, steel smelters, ironworkers, woodworkers, carpenters, lathe turners, coopers, engravers, spoon makers, joiners, bone carvers, icon painters, spinners, weavers, bakers, brewers and fishmongers.[43] If the Mongols had followed their usual practice of transporting all skilled workers in a city, they would have had to transfer two-thirds of the city to Mongolia. Novgorod boasted a modern drainage system and three cathedrals but was a constricted and overcrowded city, with a farrago of courtiers, boyars, merchants, craftsmen, free men, serfs and slaves, not to mention visiting traders, all crammed into a relatively tiny space. Quite apart from the extreme political factionalism that disfigured it, it was a place of tragedy, notorious for the high rate of epidemics, even with all the care taken over hygiene. It was also a firetrap, where conflagrations were frequent: 4,300 houses were destroyed in one fire in 1211 and a similar number in another inferno in 1231.[44] Novgorodians had a reputation for callous selfishness; they had been conspicuously absent at Kalka in 1222 and never displayed solidarity with the other Russian princes.

It was not entirely surprising, then, that when Subedei laid siege to the city of Torzhok, the most south-easterly town in the principality of Novgorod, and the inhabitants sent frantic pleas for help to the capital, they were ignored.[45] Even unaided, Torzhok put up a furious resistance and fell only on 23 March after a two-week siege. The next obvious target was Novgorod itself, but Subedei suddenly turned back when only fifty-five miles from the city. It was said that a spring thaw made the ground too muddy for effective use of horses, but this was Novgorodian propaganda put out years after the event. In fact the thaw was at least a month away. What happened was that Novgorod sent a massive bribe and pledged to pay tribute in future as a Mongol vassal.[46] This satisfied the usual 'surrender or die' requirement, so the Mongols turned south.

On the way back to base, Subedei showed himself once again a man of unusual intelligence: he avoided all areas he had devastated on the way north, bypassed the surviving towns so as not to be bogged down in irrelevancies and posed as a champion of ordinary people by pointedly raiding boyars' estates only. His colleague Batu, however, did miscalculate when the town of Kozelsk in Kaluga Province proved too tempting. Thinking he had easy pickings, Batu found himself held up by a seven-week siege. Despite the loss of face, he had to send to Subedei for significant reinforcements before he could reduce it. In his fury at this defiance, he made a point of slaughtering every human being when the town finally fell.[47]

Subedei and Batu reunited and called a long halt for rest and recuperation, spending the remainder of 1238 and most of 1239 on the steppes west of the River Don and calling for fresh mounts from Mongolia. They also recruited large numbers of steppe horses uplifted from the Cumans and other tribes – breeds such as Kazakh, Altai, Trans-Baikal, Yakut and Kirgiz, all, like their own ponies, capable of working in very cold weather and with very strong hooves.[48] The Mongol leaders rested their men in rotation, using some for garrison duties in the key conquered towns and others for campaigning; probably about half the total force would be campaigning and the other half on furlough at any given time.

Eager to increase the experience of his young commanders, Batu assigned each one a separate task, directed against the tribes of northern Caucasia and the Cumans of the south Russian steppes. Berke was sent east to extirpate the Cumans, who had revived since their defeats in 1237; Shiban and Buri waged war in the Crimea against Polovtsians, Circassians and Ossetians; Mongke and Qadan hounded the Alans in Caucasia. There was yet another defeat for the Georgians, who from 1222 to 1238 were beaten in six major battles, against either the Mongols or Jalal al-Din.[49]

These campaigns were all spectacularly successful. Shiban and Buri made an example of the town of Sudaq in the Crimea; sacked by Jebe and Subedei in 1222, it now received a second dose of Mongol mercy.[50] Mongke completed the conquest of the southern steppe area in 1239 when he took the Alan capital of Maghas.[51] Berke's triumph against the Cumans was even more resounding. Routed over and over again, the principal Qangli chieftain Koten finally took 40,000 survivors west

in a large-scale migration; a local ruler on the Danube was obliged to allow them passage across the river and through Bulgaria in a south-erly direction. Proceeding through Thrace, which they systematically laid waste, Koten and his myrmidons then changed direction until they finally reached the borders of Hungary, where a message was sent to King Bela promising massive conversion to Christianity if Koten and his men were allowed to settle peacefully on Hungarian soil. In an evil hour Bela agreed; the concession was to lead to huge repercussions.[52]

In twelve months the Mongols had achieved wonders of pacification on the steppes by proceeding patiently and securing their rear; lesser commanders might have been tempted to achieve the conquest of southern Russia prematurely, but Subedei bided his time. The year 1239 was one of those when, it seemed, the Mongols could do no wrong. One party of outriders even penetrated as far north as Karelia on the borders of Russia and Finland.[53] The Mongols also learnt of the Arctic Ocean from discussing it with Finns and others; hearing of polar winters, they dubbed it the Sea of Darkness.[54]

With the army thoroughly rested, reorganised and brought up to strength by reinforcements from Mongolia, Batu and Subedei waited until late summer 1240 before striking south into Ukraine. For reasons not entirely clear, Subedei seems to have left this campaign almost entirely to Batu. He began by taking and sacking the city of Pereyaslav and sweeping through the southern half of the principality of Chernigov, adding Glukhov, Sosnitsa, Khorobor and Snovsk to the lengthening tally of pillaged towns. Batu ranged up and down the Desna River (a left-hand tributary of the Dnieper) and its tributary, the River Seym, before closing in on the city of Chernigov. The Mongols next followed their usual procedure of surrounding a major city and then bringing giant catapults and trebuchets to bear. One of these had a range of three hundred yards and could hurl stones so heavy that it took four men to lift each one. The senior Russian prince led a sortie but this ended in a disastrous defeat, after which the city surrendered (18 October 1240).[55]

There was even less question than before of the Rus princes making common cause in face of the deadly peril that threatened them. Yaroslav of Vladimir, who controlled Novgorod, was locked in deadly rivalry with Michael of Chernigov for the putative title of greatest

prince in Russia. Michael seems to have intrigued with the Lithuanians to attack Smolensk, but Yaroslav defeated the alien intruders in 1239. It is certain that he and his eldest son Alexander had already made a definitive submission to the Mongols.

Alexander, who had been left in charge of Novgorod since 1236 at the age of 16, won himself the title of Nevsky when he defeated a small force of Swedes on the River Neva in 1240.[56] Both this, and the battle he won two years later against the Teutonic Knights, have been inflated out of all proportion by Russian state propaganda from the thirteenth century to the present day. It is quite clear that the Swedish battle, fought on 15 July 1240, was little more than a skirmish, for the total of Novgorod casualties was just twenty.[57] (Historians cannot agree what the conflict between Sweden and Novgorod was about, with some opting for a secret campaign of Catholic conversion masterminded by the Pope and spearheaded by troops from Germany, Sweden and Denmark, and others concluding that it was an outward overspill of ancient Russo-Swedish conflicts over Finland and Karelia.)[58]

Worsted by his deadly enemy Yaroslav of Vladimir, Michael was in no mood to fight the mighty Mongols, so he fled westwards in great haste and, like Koten and the Cumans, found sanctuary in Hungary. But he left behind a legacy that doomed Kiev. After the surrender of Chernigov, Mongke and his retinue rode to the outskirts of Kiev, whose beauty amazed Tolui's son. Hearing that there was a strong peace party in Kiev, he sent envoys to the city proposing very generous terms if the burghers surrendered. The useless Michael killed the envoys to prevent any chance of surrender, then rode off to safety, leaving the hapless citizens to reap the whirlwind. Everyone knew that the killing of Mongol emissaries was the *ne plus ultra* and that no quarter would subsequently be given.[59]

Accordingly Batu advanced on Kiev from the south, swatting aside the Turkic tribe, the Karakalpaks, who were supposedly the southern buffer between Kiev and any invader, and invested the city. Even without Michael's desertion, morale was hardly sky-high in the city. For the previous five years disputes about the succession to the principality and the constant intervention of other princes had weakened it spiritually and morally. In seventy years it had been sacked four times: by Suzdalia, Galicia-Volynia, Chernigov and Smolensk, and economically it had declined in comparison with all four of these

scourges. Its location so close to the power bases of the Polovtsians scarcely helped. As one historian has commented, 'the rapid changes of rulers in Kiev over the past five years can hardly have inspired the inhabitants of the capital with confidence.'[60]

Nevertheless, Kiev was far from negligible, and the inhabitants put up a surprisingly strenuous defence, led by a senior officer or *voivode* named Dmitri, who had been left behind when every last prince followed Michael's example and bolted westward. Kiev, with a population of at least 40,000 and probably closer to 100,000, was well defended, on a hilly position, by a ring of forts along the River Dnieper and on the northern and western approaches on the right bank; Kiev did not expand onto the left bank until the twentieth century. Its citadel was on high ground, surrounded by palaces and churches in an inner ring and, in an outer, by a suburban area by the river where the merchants and artisans lived, proudly surveying the wharves and the Dnieper River that linked Kiev to all major cities in Rus; the poorer townspeople cultivated plots of land beyond the city walls.[61]

Batu directed the siege with Mongke and Orda as his chief aides, making sure to terrify the Kievans with a dreadful cacophony, in which mingled the bellowing of camels, the neighing of horses and the whooping of Mongols singing out their war cries; it was said that the din was so bad that conversation inside the city was impossible.[62] The Mongols were present in force, as indicated by their ability to surround and circumvallate the entire city. They located their siege artillery near the most south-easterly of the four great gates of Kiev ('the Polish Gate') on a wooded slope that gave good cover. It was said to have taken the Mongols ten days to blast through the city's four sets of fortifications, but once the walls crumbled and they were inside the city, the end came quickly.[63] The garrison attempted a last stand in and around the Church of Tithes in the centre of the city, but there were so many refugees and defenders, most of whom had also brought their goods and chattels, that they caused the upper floors of the great church to give way under the combined weight.[64] Both the citadel and the church collapsed almost simultaneously. All was over by the feast of St Nicholas (patron saint of Rus) on 6 December 1240. The siege had lasted nine days.

Batu gave the city over to sack and plunder but spared the life of Dmitri, who had impressed him with his exceptional courage – and

also to show Mongol contempt for all the runaway princes.[65] Even though Kiev had often fallen to its enemies, the ease with which Batu had overcome it created a sensation in western Europe for, despite its decline, the splendid city was still regarded as the showpiece of Rus and the spiritual mother of the Russians. Now it lay in ruins, laid waste and reduced to rubble, the devastation so great and the pile of skulls and bones so high that it depressed the Franciscan Carpini when he passed by five years later.[66] It was the end of the Old Russia and the dawning of the dominance of the Golden Horde. Predictably, the divines of the Orthodox Church concluded that the downfall of Rus was a consequence of Russian sinfulness. Bishop Serapion of Vladimir claimed that God had allowed the Mongols to conquer the land of Rus because of the evil and lawlessness that ran from top to bottom in the social hierarchy.[67]

After Kiev Batu pressed on into Galicia-Volynia, but his campaign there was something of a walkover, with the exception of brief defiance shown by the town of Kolodyazhin on the River Sluch. The cities of Vladimir-Volynski and Halych fell after brief sieges, and Ladyzhyn and Kamenets in Podolia joined the inventory of sacked towns. Daniel of Galicia became the final prince to flee, making his way to Poland and Hungary. The boyar Dmitri of Kiev proved a valuable adviser to Batu, but his champions go too far when they claim that it was he who directed the Mongols' attention to eastern Europe; Hungary was already in Batu's sights once the Cumans had fled there.[68]

In any case, the conquest of Russia was now complete. Yet there had been casualties, not from Russian valour or force of arms but because of the factionalism among the Mongols themselves which Genghis had been able to contain but which now threatened to overwhelm Ogodei and his empire. At one of the many victory banquets held by Batu during his non-stop string of victories, a drunken wrangle developed when Batu pledged his troops in wine and took the first swig from a ceremonial goblet. Guyuk, who hated Batu, protested that Batu was in no way superior to the other princes and should not have arrogated such a privilege.[69] He was egged on by Buri, the grandson of Chagatai and son of Mogetugen who had perished at the siege of Bamiyan in 1221.[70] While Chagatai had shown no particular feeling for Mogetugen, he adored Buri, even though his grandson was both a hothead and a notorious drunkard. Mongke, who respected

Batu and knew that Ogodei had worked hard to reconcile the house of Jochi to the other princely dynasties, got on his feet to defend Batu. At this Guyuk raised the temperature with two egregious insults. Batu, he said, was just an old woman with a quiver; he was thus an inferior and, like all women risen above their station, should be kicked and trodden on.[71] Even while the assembled company was reeling, not quite believing what they had heard, Guyuk ratcheted up the tension another notch by saying that people like Batu should be whipped or hit with burning sticks – the traditional Mongol punishment for female criminals – implying that Batu was both evil and unnatural.[72] As if this was not enough to stupefy the audience in the ger, yet another dissident arose to lash Batu with his tongue. This time the reprobate was Harqasun, a minor crony in the Guyuk entourage. He proposed that a tail be attached to Batu – to attach a tail to someone was the Mongol way of bringing someone into hatred, ridicule and contempt.[73]

The banquet broke up in universal hubbub and uproar. Batu had the three offenders arrested and, given a free hand, would have executed them on the spot. But he knew that Ogodei was governed by *raison d'état* and would think this an overreaction, almost certain to plunge the empire into civil war. He sent the three of them back to Mongolia under heavy guard, together with a written statement of what had occurred, signed and verified by witnesses of the most impeccable standing. When Ogodei read the report, he was said to have fallen into the most towering rage courtiers had ever experienced from a khan, even in Genghis's day. At first he contemplated executing the trio and refused to see Guyuk, even though he was his son. He exclaimed angrily to his entourage: 'May he and he alone rot like an egg.'[74]

After keeping him in suspense for a few days while he mulled things over, Ogodei summoned Guyuk for the most devastating tongue-lashing. He had since learned that Guyuk was deeply unpopular with his troops because he was a by-the-book martinet. 'Do you think that the Russians surrendered because you were mean to your men?' he began with heavy sarcasm. 'Or because you captured two or three warriors, you imagine you won the war? From what I learn, you didn't even capture a single goat.'[75] He ordered the punishment: Guyuk was to return to Batu and make a public apology in front of the entire army or he would be put to death. As for Buri, Ogodei hesitated to

offend Chagatai, so he sent him his grandson and left the punishment to him; Chagatai sent Buri back to Europe on identical terms. Interestingly, it has been pointed out that both decisions were against the code of the Yasa.[76] Maddeningly, the sources do not tell us what happened to Harqasun, except that he survived; the entire episode is cloudy, and the authorities cannot even agree whether Harqasun was the son of Eljigidei or a mere commoner.

The upshot was interesting.[77] Ogodei died before Guyuk began his journey westward, so Guyuk was released from the necessity of apologising to the detested Batu. Buri did return, made his peace with the commander-in-chief and served with distinction in Wallachia. But Batu and his ally Mongke never forgot the insult. Guyuk died young in 1248 after two years as Great Khan, so was always beyond their reach, but both Buri and Harqasun were executed during the great purges of 1251–52; Buri was beheaded and Harqasun run through with a sword by a Horde commander who had always detested him.[78]

The Mongols were now on the eastern frontiers of Poland, and in Europe their advent caused a panic among the common people that spread as far as Spain and the Netherlands.[79] The 'Mongol storm' was already sending winds and waves as far as the Atlantic. The invasion of Russia was known about in Scotland in 1238. In England in the same year there was a glut of herrings on the market (first reported in Lowestoft), because Novgorod, preoccupied with the Mongol threat, had for once failed to send its fishing fleet out into the North Sea to compete with English fishermen.[80]

Typical of the complacent attitude evinced in England was this effusion from Peter des Roches, bishop of Winchester, in a letter to Henry III: 'Let these dogs devour one another and be utterly exterminated and then we shall see the universal Catholic Church founded on their ruins and there will be one fold and one shepherd.'[81] That was also the attitude of the three popes who reigned during the chaotic period 1238–1243. One reason was the increasing tendency of peripheral European states to acknowledge the primacy of the Roman church in return for military aid from western Europe; the Rus princes had already appealed to the papacy for help, and the hope in the Vatican was that they might be prepared to abandon the 'heresies' of the Greek and Russian Orthodox churches in return for a military

umbrella.[82] Indeed the more one examines the attitudes of the western kingdoms to the Mongols, the more one sees the short-termism of selfishness and pride. Defenders – and they are few – of the West at this juncture allege that kings, princes and pontiffs perceived the Mongols as putative allies because of their devastating attacks on Islamic powers, and that they saw them as the legendary Prester John, the fabled king from the East who would finally unite the world in Christendom.

There is no doubting that the Prester John legend was very strong for a while, but such ignorance did not really survive the 1220s.[83] By the mid-1230s the nature and identity of the Mongols was fairly clear. Queen Rusudan of Georgia was in frequent touch with the Vatican and her accounts of the storm from the East would have lost nothing in the telling, while Bela IV of Hungary had reported in detail about the Mongols' near-annihilation of the Cumans.[84] And a host of other evidence reached western Europe in the 1230s, leaving statesmen and decision-makers in no doubt about what they were up against.[85] Moreover, the Mongols in 1237 sent out multiple demands for submission to the western kingdoms. Bela was told as early as 1237 what to expect if he did not reverse his policy on sheltering the Cumans; even the papacy received an order to submit.[86]

Essentially, though, western European inertia and passivity in face of this unprecedented menace boiled down to a single factor: each of the principal actors, the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II, King Louis IX of France, and the popes, all had agendas and priorities in terms of which the Mongols were a mere footnote. Louis IX (St Louis) was obsessed with organising a crusade against the Mamelukes of Egypt and paid little attention to the Mongols.[87] The record of the papacy was even more dismal. In the first half of the thirteenth century pontiffs had preoccupations very far from the Mongol empire. Pope Innocent III (1198–1216) had preached a great crusade against the Albigensians (Cathar heretics) in southern France; this bloody conflict was at white heat until 1233 and the Albigensians were not finally suppressed until 1255.[88] The sack of Byzantium by the men of the Fourth Crusade in 1204 also showed Christendom hopelessly divided.

But above all it was the campaign waged by successive popes against Frederick II that weakened the West's ability to show a united front to the Mongols. Honorius III (reigned 1216–1227) may have

been a close friend of Francis of Assisi but his record was not otherwise distinguished. Even more myopic was Gregory IX (reigned 1227–1241), who went so far as to excommunicate Frederick in 1239. In retaliation Frederick marched on Rome but was forced to retire. The energies of the Pope in the crucial period 1240–41 were almost entirely directed against Frederick. In May 1241 Gregory convened a council to depose Frederick as Emperor, but he (Frederick) intercepted the ships carrying the French and Italian prelates to the council: he then threw them into prison and made sure they were ill-used.[89]

Even before this high drama, pope Gregory had foolishly discounted the threat from the Mongols. When the queen of Georgia begged him for help against the Mongols, he replied airily that her kingdom was too far away for help to be sent; in any case, he added, his priority was the Islamic threat in Spain and the Near East. He turned down a proposal from the Assassins in 1238 for a grand alliance of Christendom and Islam against the Mongols. In the same year he showed where his true priorities lay by preaching a crusade against the Russians because they had opposed his previous crusade in the Balkans.[90] Amazingly, there were five papacy-inspired crusades going on in the 1240s, and only one of them, and the least considerable, was against the Mongols. The last of the Cathars were still holding out; Richard of Cornwall was heading an attack on Muslims in the Holy Land; St Louis was bending all his energies against Constantinople, ostensibly crusading for the union of Greek and Latin churches; and the Swedes, Danes and Teutonic Knights were moving against Novgorod where the young Alexander Nevsky occupied a precarious perch.[91]

A small crusade was launched against Batu in 1241, though principally by the German church rather than the Pope. The army actually set out from Nuremburg in July 1241 but stopped after marching fifty miles, possibly because the Mongols were no longer reported on the German border. Ludicrously chauvinistic German annalists later claimed that Batu and Subedei had been frightened off by this 'host'.[92] This is preposterous on two counts. In September 1241 Germany descended into chaos as a result of the revolt of the barons against Frederick's son Conrad, and the nation remained on the brink of civil war for a decade; the money raised for the crusade against the Mongols was spent instead on a crusade against the Hohenstaufen dynasty.

Secondly, there is clear evidence that the 'crusade' was a mere self-defence force and there was never any question of its entering Hungary.[93]

In any case, all ideas of general anti-Mongol crusades went into abeyance when Pope Gregory died in August 1241. He at least had promised Bela IV a crusade 'in principle' but now all was subsumed in the maelstrom of Vatican politics as the conclave was held to elect a new pontiff. Celestine IV emerged in October 1241 but lasted a mere three weeks (25 October–10 November 1241). The luckless Bela sent an embassy to Rome to lobby the new pope but the envoys' ship was caught in a storm on the Adriatic and they all drowned. When Bela tried again in June 1243, he was fobbed off by the cardinals.[94]

Yet the most culpable ostrich of all the western European leaders was the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II, sometimes absurdly hailed as the greatest man of the thirteenth century – absurd if only because true greatness is measured by achievement, not natural talents or abilities. Known as 'the wonder of the world (*Stupor Mundi*)', Frederick was a man of extraordinary energy and ability who spoke six languages (German, French, Latin, Greek, Sicilian and Arabic), a patron of science, literature and the arts but also a religious sceptic who denounced Moses, Jesus and Muhammad as frauds and liked to mock organised religion and utter deliberate blasphemies.[95] Nietzsche hailed him as the first European and some historians have glossed this as first modern ruler. Dante, on the other hand, consigned him to the sixth region of his Inferno for crusading while excommunicate and recruiting Saracens into his army. Red-haired, bald, myopic, with green eyes like a serpent, Frederick was fascinated by astrology, besotted with exotic animals but contemptuous of human beings, to the point where he conducted Nazi-style 'scientific' experiments on them.[96] He was also an expert falconer and world authority on the birds. When Batu sent him the order to submit, Frederick laughed it off and said that he would do well as a Mongol subject, since both he and Ogodei were top-class falconers.[97] He disdained his native Germany but adored his kingdom in Sicily. After his coronation in 1220 at the age of 26, he stayed just one year (1236–37) in Germany, with the remainder spent either in Sicily or on the Sixth Crusade; he was criticised for this much as Richard the Lionheart was for his almost total absence from England. He spent most of his reign locked in combat with the papacy in a

wide-ranging conflict that disfigured Western Christendom, because the papal dominions blocked the route between his domains in north Italy and his realm in Sicily, which he turned into a showpiece of efficient bureaucracy.[98] This struggle reached its apogee during the pontificate of Gregory IX; the ultimate point of absurdity was in mid-February 1241 when, with the Mongols already deep inside Poland and Hungary, the Pope wrote a pastoral letter to the Hungarians calling for prayer, not against the invaders from the east but against Frederick the infidel.[99] Frederick was excommunicated four times and dubbed the Antichrist by Gregory IX. It was hoped that the election of a new pope in 1243 would change things but Innocent IV, on stepping into the shoes of the Fisherman in June, immediately confirmed the excommunication.[100]

Both Frederick and the papacy were far more interested in their own internecine conflict than the looming external threat from the Mongols, and both sides claimed they could do nothing against Batu and Subedei unless the other party bowed the head and made peace. It is true that Frederick wrote to both St Louis of France and Henry III of England to propose joint action against the Mongols,[101] but the proposal was a mere diplomatic ploy to gain propaganda advantage and show the papacy as incompetent – which it was, but so was Frederick *as regards* the Mongols. So limp was his response to the 'centaurs of the steppes' that a rumour arose that he had deliberately invited the Mongols to invade Europe.[102]

A united Europe would have been an impossible obstacle for Batu and Subedei to overcome but at the very moment of its supreme peril the West could not have been more hopelessly divided; this time the Mongols had not even had to foment any internal discontent among their enemies. Accordingly the two leaders planned their next move with confidence. Batu and Subedei planned to take the main army of 30,000, reinforced now with prisoners from Russia forced to serve in the front ranks, into Hungary. But they had to reckon with the possibility that Poland, Bohemia and even Frederick II might lend a hand to Bela IV of Hungary when they attacked. Their strategy therefore encompassed a simultaneous attack on Poland, to be led by Qadan, Ogodei's second son, and Baidar, son of Chagatai, commanding a force of about 20,000.[103]

This was of course classic Mongol strategy: protect a threatened

flank by attacking the potential enemy on that flank. Qadan and Baidar had instructions not to press deeper into Moravia if they overran Poland but, once the threat to the flank was neutralised, to swing south and join Batu and Subedei in Hungary. Moving out from Volynia, the two up-and-coming Mongol princes crossed the frozen Vistula on an icy causeway on 13 February 1241 and immediately routed the Polish force waiting for them on the far side at Tursk.

Their intelligence was first-class and they knew all the Polish weaknesses, principally that the land was riven with factionalism. The Poland of the thirteenth century comprised roughly the southern half of modern Poland; the Baltic coast had been occupied by Teutonic Knights and Lithuanians, forcing the Poles inland. The rump that was left was itself divided into four mini-states.[104] There was the domain of Bolesław IV, titular king of Poland, the provinces of Cracow and Sandomir under Conrad of Masovia, Mieczysław (Mieszko) II, Duke of Oppeln-Ratibor (modern Opole and Raciborz) and Duke Henry II of Silesia; of these Henry of Silesia was easily the most powerful even though the mercurial Bolesław insisted that the other three had to bend the knee to him, with the inevitable result of ongoing civil war.[105]

The Poles were almost ludicrously mismatched against the Mongols. Discipline was poor in the Christian armies which had only the most rudimentary organisation and staff work. Aside from the four-way struggle for power, there were other internal jealousies, and commands were given out on the basis of birth, not merit. The primary weapons of the Poles were the lance and the broadsword, whose effectiveness depended on being able to get to close quarters; the Mongols by contrast had long-distance archery and even primitive explosives, and they depended on speed, not heavy armour. Finally there was the difference between a lumbering Christian commander, in the thick of battle where his standard could be easily identified, and a Mongol general who was highly mobile and communicated by flags.[106] There is evidence, too, that the Poles might already have been psychologically overawed by their opponents. By this time westerners routinely referred to the Mongols as 'Tartars' – using the name of one of the minor tribes of Mongolia but conscious of the pun on 'Tartarus', the hell of classical mythology.[107]

Advancing westward towards Lublin, the Mongols appear to have split up temporarily, with Baidar and Qadan each taking one of the

two tumens Subedei had assigned to them. It is quite clear that there were two tumens operating in Poland, though the 'downsizing' school of historians likes to insist there was just one – in which case it would have been madness to divide the force.[108] While it is accepted that tumens, like Roman legions, were rarely at full strength, the extra fighters recruited from the conquered Rus states have to be taken into account.[109]

Baidar's group ran into Bolesław IV and a large army on 18 March at Chmielnik and routed him utterly. It was a devastating defeat: the best modern historian of Poland in the English-speaking world says simply that the assembled nobility of Little Poland (the south-eastern sector of the modern nation) perished all at once.[110] Bolesław fled and took no further part in the campaign, though he did allow his Moravians leave to fight on against the Mongols if they so chose. The two Mongol forces reunited soon afterwards and marched on Cracow. They found it deserted, entered it in silence on Palm Sunday and burnt it to the ground.

The Poles had meanwhile broken down the bridges over the River Oder but the Mongols were undeterred and crossed the river at Ratibor on an improvised fleet of boats. Their next target was Breslau (modern Wrocław), capital of Silesia. They took the main city with ease – some say Henry of Silesia deliberately left it as bait to slow the enemy down – but the citadel remained defiant and would have been costly to capture, so Baidar elected to bypass it.[111] He had received intelligence that Henry of Silesia was at Liegnitz (Legnica) with a large force, marking time until his brother-in-law Wenceslas I of Bohemia could join forces with him with another army. Baidar and Qadan decided not to waste time on lengthy and strategically pointless sieges of strongly fortified citadels, but to strike at Henry before he could be reinforced.[112]

And so, ten miles from Liegnitz, near Wahlstatt, on 9 April 1241, there occurred one of the most traumatic events in Polish history. The Mongols were represented by three sons of Ogodei and his brothers: Baidar, Qadan and Orda. On the Polish side, commanded by Henry of Silesia, were four main groups: Henry himself with a picked force of Silesian knights, Moravian volunteers and elite units from the military orders, the Templars and Hospitallers; Bavarians released by Bolesław; Mieczysław and the army of Oppeln/Opole;

and Sulisław, the brother of the Palatine (*voivode*) of Cracow (who had been slain at Chmielnik) with his levies, including conscripts from Greater Poland. It was, on paper, a formidable array.[113]

Henry rode to the battlefield, reasonably confident that the Mongols would find no answer to his heavily armoured knights. It was said that as he passed the church of the Blessed Virgin in Liegnitz town, a stone fell from the roof and narrowly missed his head; it was interpreted as a bad omen.[114] Henry opted to attack the Mongol centre in relays, sending successive waves against the enemy vanguard, hoping to crack it so that disarray and confusion would follow, with ranks of Mongol horsemen trampling each other. The first assault was made by his own Silesian knights and the second by Sulisław and his contingent, but both were were beaten off with a fusillade of Mongol arrows.[115] Next he sent forward the Bavarian troops previously under Bolesław's command. At this the Mongols appeared to falter and began retreating but as they did so, they set up a smokescreen on the flanks, using smoke-bombs which they had perfected in China against the Jin, gradually drawing the Polish cavalry away from their infantry and meanwhile working round their flanks unseen with their own light cavalry. Knowing nothing of such weapons, the Silesians later concocted a story that the Mongols had unfurled a huge banner from which they released a cloud of 'miasmata' with a dreadful foetor, allegedly the cause of mass vomiting in their ranks.[116]

That was a later rationalisation, for at the time the Poles were euphoric. Seeing the Mongols fleeing and a gap opening up between the Bavarian pursuers and his main force, Henry sent up the cavalry under Mieczysław in support. At this point the Mongols added subterfuge to their initial feigned retreat. They increased the smokescreen and from within the gloom made anyone in their army who could speak Polish shout out, 'Run, run!' Mieczysław was confused and suspected that the Bavarians had been ambushed, but could see nothing clearly. He decided to retreat to safety.[117] By this time the Polish quartet had become split up and confused. With perfect timing the Mongol leaders ordered the counter-attack on the strung-out Poles. Their heavy cavalry wheeled about and charged while the light cavalry deluged the Poles with arrows.

Bewilderment being first cousin to panic, it was not long before the Poles became suffused with the spirit of *sauve qui peut*, but it was

too late. The Mongols picked their units off piecemeal and slaughtered them at will, using their deadly arrows to turn what started as a battle into a virtual turkey-shoot.[118] Hardly a man escaped. One who did was Mieczysław, who fled back to the security of the citadel at Liegnitz. Henry, finding himself and his knights surrounded, made several attempts to cut his way out of the ever tightening Mongol cordon, but in vain; the only result for his efforts was that he had two horses shot from under him.

There are two accounts of his death. One was that he was run through by a lance under the armpit, expired and had his head cut off after death. The other, more likely, account is that the Mongols captured him and forced him to kneel beside the corpse of a beloved Mongol general killed at Sandomir before they decapitated him. His headless and naked body was later recognised by his wife Anne, allegedly because he had six toes on his left foot.[119] He was buried in the Franciscan church of St Vincent at Breslau.

Liegnitz was a catastrophe for Poland. Almost all the 20–25,000 men in their army were massacred in a disaster as complete in its own way as Hannibal's victory over the Romans at Cannae in 216 BC. The Mongols were said to have cut the ears from the fallen and filled nine gigantic sacks with them.[120] Many myths arose from the debacle at Liegnitz. One was that a large number of Teutonic Knights had died, including their Grand Master Poppo von Osterna, but the order was not represented by a single cavalryman at the battle, and Poppo himself died in 1257. Evidently there was confusion with the Templars, who did suffer grievously. Their Grand Master Ponce d'Aubon reported to St Louis that he had lost five hundred dead, including nine brothers, three senior knights and two sergeants.[121]

The two principal Polish survivors, Mieczysław and Boleslaw, seemed to have learned nothing from their experience and continued feuding until the former's death in 1246. Superficially, the Mongol victory in Poland scarcely affected the course of that nation's history at all, though some historians claim that the loss of Silesia delayed Polish unification for a century. Chistendom in general reacted to the defeat with a kind of collective denial, most clearly seen in Carpini's reports in 1245 when he claimed that the Mongols were forced to withdraw after taking heavy losses at Liegnitz. Almost inevitably, given the medieval mindset on one hand and a bizarre logical alchemy on

the other, the Jews were accused of having colluded with the Mongols to incite the invasion.[122]

The propagandist nonsense continued when Baidar and Qadan turned south into Moravia (the eastern part of the modern Czech Republic), hoping to locate Wenceslas I and bring him to battle. They camped for two weeks near Otmuchow, between Opole and Klodzko, resting their victorious troops. Advancing on Klodzko (on the borders of present-day Poland and the Czech Republic), they found, as at Breslau and Liegnitz earlier, that the citadel was too strong to take unless they were prepared to spend months investing it – but the orders from Batu and Subedei expressly stated that they should not be diverted from their sole concern, which was to disable the Poles so that they could not intervene in Hungary.[123] Nevertheless, in May they cut a swathe of destruction through Moravia, sacking several towns and monasteries, even raiding the border towns of Austria on the left bank of the Danube.[124]

They approached Olmutz (Olomouc) but found the castle too well defended by Jaroslav of Sternberg, a *voivode* of Wenceslas I, who was far too terrified to face the Mongols himself and skulked in the mountains of Bohemia; from this arose the absurd canard that the Mongols had suffered a serious reverse at Olmutz – one more item in the inventory of European nonsense about the invasion of 1240–42.[125] From afar Wenceslas sent out a number of small forces to try to lure the Mongols into ambush, but their intelligence was far too good to be caught in that way.[126] The common people of Moravia largely deserted the towns and hid in the woods and in caves. A few hardier souls actually tried to sell produce to the invaders and were astonished to find that the Mongols ate neither bread nor vegetables.[127] There were the usual atrocities common to victorious warriors in all eras, who consider the civilian population, and especially the women, to be fair game. Finally Baidar and Qadan received a courier from Subedei telling them of great success in Hungary and requesting their presence on garrison duties. The Mongols turned south-east, crossed the Carpathians and rejoined the main army in the land of the Magyars.[128]

17

Hungary and the Adriatic

Batu and Subedei meanwhile had closed in on Hungary, then a nation of around two million people and a little larger than the modern country in area, ranging from the Carpathians and the Transylvanian Alps to the Adriatic, including much of modern Croatia. The Mongols had correctly identified the Alfold region of the Pannonian plain as the gateway to western Europe, and an ideal base for their operations, as the puszta – a flat, treeless, savannah-like area ideal for horses and horse-breeding – most closely resembled the steppes of Central Asia and Mongolia. It was a perfect launchpad from which the rest of Europe could be invaded and conquered.[1] It was therefore a key area which should have been heavily defended by the nations of western Europe, who instead fiddled while Hungary burned.

Since Hungary was reportedly the premier military nation in Europe, with its knights the flower of medieval chivalry, it would have been in a strong position even unaided if only it had been homogeneous and united. But ever since the foundation of the nation at the beginning of the eleventh century, there had been constant disputes about the royal succession, which allowed both Byzantium and the German emperor to intervene. The reign of Bela III (1172/3–1196) has often been seen as a golden age, but the next leading member of the Arpad dynasty, the frivolous and unprincipled Andrew II (1205–1235) was a disaster.[2] For the first seven years after his father's death, Andrew conspired continuously against his brother king Emeric of Hungary, who had made him governor of Croatia and Dalmatia. These intrigues culminated with the battle of Rad in 1199 when Emeric defeated his turbulent brother and Andrew was forced into exile in Austria. The papacy patched up a peace between the warring siblings in 1200 but matters went sour again when Andrew married Gertrude of Merania,

a bad influence who encouraged him to hatch further plots. Emeric died in 1204 and passed the succession to his infant son Ladislaus, who did not survive long.[3]

On his death in May 1205, Andrew succeeded. He had already proved himself amoral, unscrupulous and treacherous. When Bela III had died, he had left Andrew a huge sum of money on the strict condition that he went on crusade. Vain, lightheaded, unprincipled, Andrew used the money instead to buy himself a personal following of sycophants and refused to go to the Holy Land, even when threatened with excommunication by Pope Innocent III.[4] His irresponsibility and selective financial generosity – that is, only to his followers – alienated the great barons who staged an attempted coup in 1213, in the course of which Gertrude was assassinated. Andrew weakly executed only the ringleader of the coup and pardoned all the other participants. Gertrude left behind two noteworthy children, Bela (later Bela IV), who became the great political survivor of Hungary (reigned 1235–1270) and Elizabeth (1207–1231), a remarkable woman who followed the tenets of Francis of Assisi and gave away all her wealth to the poor; she was later canonised by the Catholic Church.[5]

The young Bela always hated his father, and the rancour increased when in 1215 Andrew married Yolanda, niece of Henry, the Latin emperor of Constantinople, hoping (in vain) to inherit that throne also. In 1217 Andrew embarked from Split for the Fifth Crusade but had barely arrived in the Holy Land before he was homeward bound again. The conflict with the barons produced anarchy until 1222. Andrew, wildly ambitious but spendthrift, waged no fewer than fourteen wars of aggression in the first fifteen years of his reign, at the very time he was spending madly on a luxurious royal household. When he tried to increase taxation, the barons rebelled and issued the so-called Golden Bull, Hungary's version of the Magna Carta.[6] This absolved the nobility from all taxation and from the necessity of waging war outside Hungary's frontiers. But Andrew, having signed the document, showed scant respect for the Bull. Eventually the papacy was sucked into the conflict when Robert, archbishop of Esztergom put the country under interdict in 1231 because Andrew had not fulfilled the clauses of the Bull. Andrew got round this by going over the bishop's head and appealing to the Vatican. The concordat he signed with the pope in 1233 at Bereg was a shameful document, on paper

generating huge revenues for the Church; the problem was that Andrew did not abide by the document and continued in his old ways.

It was to general relief that he died in 1235 but young Bela, succeeding as Bela IV, opened a fresh can of worms. Anarchy prevailed throughout the kingdom, there had been a botched attempt to devalue the currency, and the great landowners had become a law unto themselves. Bela was a narrow-minded, pedantic, humourless, deeply conservative figure, whose first instinct was to annul the Golden Bull and put the clock back to the time of his namesake, the great Bela III.[8] While not able to rescind the Golden Bull without an open breach with the papacy, Bela struck out viciously at its authors and at all barons who had supported his hated father. The former he put in jail or exiled; the latter he treated more harshly and even blinded one of them. As part of his general persecution of the nobility, he denied them the right to sit in the royal presence.[9] He also reduced the power of the barons by switching the source of royal income away from land and agriculture to coinage, mining and customs duties.[10] And whereas in the past kings of Hungary had rewarded nobles who fought for them with estates and properties, Bela not only failed to continue this tradition but also expropriated such estates granted to previous generations.[11] Bela considered himself much too grand to deal with the resulting lawsuits from the nobles; he insisted that they had to deal with his chancellors and hear decisions from them. These lawsuits, in the manner of Jarndyce v Jarndyce in *Bleak House*, were deliberately designed to drag on forever, thus financially ruining those who stayed to await the outcome – which would usually turn on an irrational whim by a chancellor anyway.[12] As if all this was not enough, Bela decided to squabble with the Vatican because Gregory IX forbade him to employ Jews and Muslims in the royal household; the upshot was the excommunication of many of the king's closest supporters. The result of all this was that Bela came to be more cordially detested by the aristocracy of Hungary than even his father Andrew had ever been.[13]

Yet perhaps an even more important reason for Bela IV's deep unpopularity by the late 1230s related to his controversial policy towards the Cumans. Koten, their leader, a veteran of the battle of Kalka in 1222, had taken one beating too many from the Mongols, and in 1238, after further costly defeats by them, had ordered a great migration

westward to escape his tormentors. Around 40,000 warriors accompanied him. The Latin emperor in Constantinople allowed 10,000 of them to settle in Thrace (Bulgaria) in 1241, where they played an important role in the development of Bulgaria as a state; one of Koten's daughters married the French nobleman Narjot de Toucy, who was Regent of the Latin empire in 1228–31 and 1238–39.[14] Meanwhile the other 30,000, under Koten, arrived on the borders of Hungary in 1239 and asked permission to settle within Bela's realm, hinting broadly that if they were denied access they would enter anyway. Bela saw a golden chance to form his own praetorian guard as a bulwark against the hostile barons. He agreed to admit them provided they accepted mass conversion to Catholicism and swore an oath of personal loyalty to him; significantly, he made this offer without any reference to his nobility but with the enthusiastic backing of the Dominican order.[15] He sent a deputation of Dominican friars as his envoys to Koten, who agreed the terms, and the two leaders later met in Transylvania to ratify the deal.[16] There was cynicism on both sides, each trying to use the other for maximum advantage. No documents were kept relating to the deal struck between Koten and Bela, which deepened the suspicion among the barons that Bela had acquired a private army on the cheap in return for a bogus 'conversion'. It was also said that he was trying to solve the problem of troublesome nomads on his frontier by absorbing them and hoping for credit from the Vatican by posing as a champion of the Faith.[17]

Bela professed himself enthusiastic about his new allies, all the more prized because of the looming Mongol threat, but Koten and his horde requited this with cattle-rustling, looting, rape and mass destruction of orchards, vineyards and crops. The foolish Bela had taken no thought for how nomads, used to a life of casual plunder, were supposed to coexist with a settled peasantry.[18] Aristocracy and peasantry made common cause in detesting the new arrivals, and their relish for rape raised sexual tensions to boiling point, whereby each side made it almost a point of honour to mistreat and abuse the other's women.

There have always been two views about which side was the more culpable. A contemporary witness spoke of Cuman resentment that 'their women were bedded by the Hungarians as if they were worthless.'[19] But in the words of a modern historian of Hungary, 'Complaints

were voiced that the Cuman men were paying too much attention to Hungarian women, whereas it seemed that the ugliness of the Cuman women debarred the Hungarians from seeking compensation in kind.'[20] Hungarian hatred of the Cumans poured out in a deluge of anger. There were two especial complaints. Whereas Bela sought to dampen down native anxieties about the newcomers by announcing that he would disperse the Cumans throughout various provinces, he never dared put his plan into operation for fear of provoking Koten and his myrmidons to revolt.[21] Hungarian peasants were exhorted to take all their grievances before local tribunals for judgement, but they found that Bela had stacked the deck against them by blatant favouritism. If a Cuman complained about a Hungarian, he was given full justice, but if a Hungarian brought charges against a Cuman, he was told to go away and cease being a troublemaker; if he persisted, he was treated to the lash. When challenged about all this, Bela simply expounded a ludicrous doctrine that the 'favouritism' shown to the Cumans was simply the special consideration anyone would show to a guest.[22]

Disgusted and disillusioned with Bela, more and more aristocrats looked for salvation to the emperor, Frederick II. Frederick was bitter that Bela had remained neutral during his own struggles with the papacy. When anti-Bela oligarchs offered him the crown of Hungary in 1236–37, with the proviso that he would invade and expel Bela, Frederick did not turn the offer down but, claiming that he needed more time to consider it, kept it on ice.[23] He also encouraged his quarrelsome and aggressive vassal prince Frederick II of Austria and Styria (reigned 1230–1246) to foment trouble in Hungary. This Duke Frederick also increased his pressure on Bela by making him a huge loan on usurious terms.[24]

When Bela appealed to *'Stupor Mundi'* to aid him against a Mongol invasion, Frederick said he was unable to help because the papacy was making war on him; when he approached the papacy, he was told that the emperor was at fault, and it was Frederick's belligerence that prevented the Vatican from helping.[25] The emperor was widely suspected of being content to see Bela so weakened that either he lost his throne or he would be forced to accept vassal status under him.[26]

Despite all his setbacks, Bela remained absurdly confident of being able to hold his own against Batu and Subedei if it came to a show-

down. In part this was smug complacency: Hungary had been at peace externally for a very long time (since the days of Andrew) and Bela was confident of his military strength, especially with the Cumans as a light cavalry arm. There was also something of a condescending mentality of innate superiority to 'mere' nomadic barbarians who, it was thought, could not stand up to the finest knights in Christendom.[27] Partly his aplomb was rational for, as a modern historian has remarked, 'the Hungarian army was an imposing force, and it is certain it would have been able to oppose with success any of the contemporary European powers.'[28] Yet the same stupidity that induced him to admit the Cumans into his realm manifested itself in Bela's dealings with the Mongols. Batu sent an embassy to him, demanding that he expel the Cumans forthwith, as they were the Mongols' traditional enemies. The principal emissary was said to have been an Englishman who entered the service of the Mongols after being banished from his homeland for life. Not only did Bela reply defiantly and insultingly, but he killed the envoys, thus making it certain that he would be marked down for destruction.[29]

For a week or two Batu and Subedei played cat-and-mouse with Bela, advancing to the frontier, pulling their forces back to lull the Hungarians, then advancing again, this time in earnest. Bela hurriedly sent troops to the Verecke pass in the north-eastern Carpathians, the enemy's most likely entry point. He also called out a general levy but the reponse was disappointing; it was a case of 'crying wolf' – the peasants had heard 'The Mongols are coming' once too often.[30]

Given that Bela had thought to snuggle up to the Vatican by his mass 'conversion' of the Cumans, what happened next was ironical, for it was priestcraft that awoke the nomadic kraken. Ugolin, Archbishop of Kalocsa (and royal chancellor 1230–35) was a long-standing confidant of Bela and had been commissioned by him to go to Venice for an archiepiscopal conclave to discuss opposition to Emperor Frederick. Ugolin and his fellow prelates were just on the point of setting out when Bela abruptly cancelled the trip, citing the imminent threat of Mongol invasion. Irritated and exasperated at the thought they now had to face danger instead of lolling in comfort in Venice, the divines vindictively stirred up resentment against the Cumans, preaching that the Cumans were the Mongols' fifth column and foolish Bela had been duped.[31]

Seriously rattled, Koten asked Bela for an armed escort to the royal presence. Bela responded by arresting him and his guards while he pondered what to do. An angry mob stormed down to the palace where Koten was being held. Bela and his men held off the baying crowd for a while with expert archery, but in the end sheer weight of numbers told. The mob burst in, lynched Koten and then beheaded him, and massacred all the guards, ending by throwing the severed heads out of the windows to the savage crowd below.[32] In the atmosphere of duplicity and double-crossing that was Hungary in the 1240s it was easily believed that the entire murder raid had been a set-up operation by Bela himself or Frederick of Austria.

At news of their leader's death, Koten's people rose up in fury and laid waste the whole of Hungary west of the Danube. In retaliation the Hungarians struck back savagely, forcing the surviving Cumans south and out of the country. It was an episode of mass murder, where the Hungarians took the line that the only good Cuman was a dead one, and the Cumans responded in kind.[33] At least one pitched battle was fought, between the levies of Bishop Bulcsu of Csanad and other nobles when these worthies, fleeing to upper Hungary, collided with the Cumans and were forced to hack their way through them. It was hardly a propitious start to a life-and-death struggle against the Mongols. And Bela's much-cosseted 'praetorians' were no longer available to do battle with the Mongols.

Bela himself was being rapidly overtaken by events. On 17 February he convened a well-attended assembly in Buda, in those days a separate city from Pest on the other side of the Danube and notable for a vast foreign population, including Germans, Slavs and Muslims.[34] Unaware of the most recent developments, the barons cried out for the imprisonment of Koten, alleging that the Cumans were really Mongols masquerading as another tribe. They also imposed very stiff conditions for their support, which Bela seems to have conceded, doubtless intending to break his word once he had defeated the Mongols. But even as the nobles were debating, word came in that the Mongols were through the Carpathians. Bela dismissed the assembly and got his army on the march, sending his queen and the elderly clergy to safety in Austria.[35]

The Mongol strategy for the invasion of Hungary was masterly and bears all the hallmarks of Subedei, especially his genius at coordinating

widely separated armies. Whereas when making systematic conquests the Mongols proceeded slowly to allow their herds to keep pace, speed was to be the essence of this attack and they planned to live entirely off the land.[36] Subedei's objective was to bring Bela to battle as soon as possible and defeat him, before the West could mount a rescue operation. But it was important that while driving for Buda and Pest on the Danube, eastern Hungary should be thoroughly subjugated. He therefore devised an advance in three columns, perfectly planned and coordinated so that the three separate forces would unite at the Danube. Anticipating Napoleon's methods and using fast couriers, Subedei made sure that the three armies were constantly in touch and could come together at great speed. The two flank columns would trace the circumference of an elongated circle while the central force, under Batu, would move along the diameter.[37]

Batu's brother Shiban would cover the northern sector between Poland and Moravia. With its flank covered by the Vistula, this column moved west to the north of the Carpathians, crossed the nine-hundred-mile-long ridge of mountains through the easy Jablonica pass, and then proceeded south-west down the Morava and Vah Rivers. Sweeping round in a curved trajectory, it protected the main force from any flank attack from Austria. The left wing under Qadan swept in a south-easterly direction via the Borgo or Tihuta pass through Moldavia (between the eastern Carpathians and the Dniester River), with detachments thrown out into Wallachia, land of bears, wolves and lynxes, and then through the pass into Transylvania before following the course of the Tisza River towards Pest.[38]

The main army under Batu went through the Verecke pass and debouched into the upper Tisza valley. This force encountered the army of the Count Palatine of Hungary on the other side of the mountains and routed it in short order on 12 March, allowing the hapless Palatine to return to Bela with news of his own defeat.[39] The progress made by Batu was remarkable, for roads in Hungary were then virtually non-existent and Bela had prepared a labyrinth of obstacles for any invader approaching Hungary through the Verecke pass – ditches, trenches, felled trees – all designed to funnel invaders into well-guarded 'gates'. It was said that by 1241 Hungary's few roads were so overgrown with weeds and thorns that travellers had to navigate from village to village by ascending high ground and plotting a route from one church

steeple to the next. Batu circumvented the system of obstacles and booby-traps by sending his pioneer corps ahead to remove obstacles, cut new paths through forests and even lay new roads.[40] Subedei was at some distance from Batu. He started after him, soon caught up, and went ahead to form the vanguard.[41]

Easily the most action-packed and devastating journey of the three was that achieved by the southern column under Qadan. In northern Transylvania, at the town of Rodna in the heart of silver-mining country, his men were confronted by a large party of armed Saxon miners, who had made the town into a German enclave. The Mongols simply turned tail and fled. The foolish miners, exulting in their 'victory' held a celebratory banquet and were hopelessly drunk when the Mongols returned at night and slaughtered them. Hearing of this debacle, another six hundred Germans in another mining town sent in their surrender, and were at once pressed into service in Qadan's front line.[42] Qadan's forces ranged far and wide, reaching modern Timisoara to the south-west. Their progress was notable for slaughter and devastation.[43]

Using the German miners as guides, the Mongols arrived at the city of Oradea (today just inside the Romanian border), a populous centre with a citadel. They gutted the entire town except for the citadel, then massacred all the inhabitants as revenge for the defiance of the citadel's garrison. The women were gang-raped and there were mass beheadings outside the city; some unfortunates were burned alive inside the cathedral. The Mongols then used a variant of the feigned retreat, left the town, camped five miles away and waited. The garrison finally emerged, thinking it was safe, whereupon the Mongols made a lightning raid at dawn and butchered them, reserving a few for torture. A handful managed to scramble back into the citadel, but the Mongols then demolished it with trebuchets. The stench from the dead soon became intolerable, and Qadan ordered evacuation, but he was still not convinced he had accounted for all the Hungarians. He lay in wait and, when survivors began to creep back to town out of the woods, sprang out and slaughtered them.[44]

Bishop Benedict of Oradea had been collecting a great army on Bela's orders and was about to march west with a large force to join him at Pest; instead, on hearing of the sack of his city he turned towards the invaders, but fell victim to another of the Mongols'

favourite ploys. Fearing themselves outnumbered, the Mongols had hundreds of dummies mounted on spare horses, with orders that they would be brought to the skyline at precisely the right moment. When the Hungarians appeared, the Mongol army fled in feigned panic, drawing them towards the hills where the phantom army was hidden. Suddenly a new 'host' (the dummies) appeared on the horizon. Fearing that they had been lured into an ambush, Bishop Benedict's men wheeled around in a panic; the Mongols then turned, pursued and slaughtered them.[45]

The list of towns and villages taken by Qadan's column went on and on: the episcopal city of Csanad (also called Urbs Morisena, the heart of the original realm founded by the Arpads in 1000) was sacked and Szeged was afflicted 'with every sort of atrocity'[46] – although this time the inhabitants found safety in nearby marshes – as were others whose locations are no longer identifiable, such as Voivoden and Emmata.

The sack of Szeged was notable for featuring a race between the forces of Bujek, who had been sent on raids to the far south, and Qadan's 's main detachment coming from the north-east. It is unclear why Qadan was allowed so much leeway to loot and sack while Shiban had express orders never to halt on his march, and some say only part of Qadan's force linked up with Batu and Subedei on the Danube, with Qadan absent from the subsequent battle, having stayed behind to complete his progamme of gutting and pillaging.[47] This would explain the many puzzling references to the Mongols at Oradea and elsewhere being outnumbered. It also explains why Shiban's column linked up with Batu on 17 March but Qadan's left wing not until 2 April.[48] Only when Shiban was almost within hailing distance of Batu did the leader let him off the leash and allow him to sack Vac, a city twenty-two miles north of modern Budapest on the eastern bank of the Danube, below the bend where the river changes course and flows south.

Shiban's men enjoyed a thorough sacking and moved into a position slightly north-west of Batu. Shiban had performed brilliantly, averaging fifty miles a day over very difficult country.[49] Yet even that paled alongside Subedei's achievement. He covered 180 miles in three days, riding through deep snow and barely stopping for food. Once at the Danube, and about ten miles ahead of Batu, Subedei took his men straight into battle. Archbishop Ugolin of Kalocsa thought he saw a

chance to isolate Subedei's vanguard from the main Mongol force but once again fell for the feigned retreat stratagem. Subedei lured his force into a marsh where they got bogged down and ended up as sitting ducks for Mongol arrows; miraculously Ugolin and a handful of retainers escaped.[50]

When Bela heard of this rash adventure, he was enraged at the archbishop's folly. He had ordered all barons and churchmen to assemble at Pest to form a huge army for a decisive trial of strength with the Mongols, and it was implicit in his orders that there were to be no sideshows or individual forays. Duke Frederick of Austria was another who disobeyed these orders. He attacked a Mongol foraging party, claimed a great victory, proclaimed Bela a coward and promptly went home. Bela was held responsible for these pointless diversions as much as for his other genuine mistakes – his failure to build forts on the Polish–Hungarian border, his sluggish response to the invasion, and his killing the Mongol envoys in the first place. Emperor Frederick II, who had never liked Bela and despised him, never tired of pointing to these three areas as special proof of Bela's military incompetence.[51]

The hosts of Batu and Bela were now in sight of each other, on either side of the Danube. Batu tried to tempt the king onto the eastern bank but Bela, though no great military talent, knew enough not to cross a mighty river with formidable conquerors waiting for him on the far side. Realising that Bela was never going to take the bait, Batu and Subedei began to retreat eastwards, and there followed six days of forced marches with a jubilant Bela on their tail. Near where the River Hernad flows into the River Sajo (a tributary of the Tisza), the Mongols drew up their forces; Bela halted on the other side of the Sajo, on the plains of Mohi, south-west of Batu's force, near the vine-clad slopes of Tokaj.

Beyond the plain were extensive marshes, deeply flooded as both rivers had recently been in spate.[52] There Bela built a fortified camp, intended to be a ring of steel, with large wagons laagered in a circle. This would certainly keep most enemies out, but of course in the event of a reverse it could also keep his own men in. As always with medieval battles, and especially those involving the Mongols, the numbers in the armies are disputed. The older authorities used to give statistics of 70,000 Hungarians ranged against 40,000 Mongols but it seems likely that these numbers are too high; modern historians tend to opt for about 20,000 Mongols versus 25,000 Hungarians, but certainty is impossible.[53]

There was a 200-yard-long bridge across the Sajo hard by Bela's camp, surrounded by swamps. Once again Batu tried to lure Bela across a river by exhibiting tiny forces, and once again the king declined, possibly because the Mongols were not entirely visible on the tree-lined shores.[54] It seems likely that morale was not particularly high on either side. Bela's exhortation to his troops was reported to have fallen flat, while Batu seems to have had so little confidence in the outcome that he went up a hillside to pray to Tengerri and asked the Islamic troops in the army to direct their prayers for success to Allah.[55] Batu had all his best commanders with him, including the brilliant Subedei, who may already have learned of the triumph at Liegnitz only the day before, via his super-fast mounted couriers. Bela had the support of most of the bishops of Hungary, including the martial Ugolin, who had always supported the barons. Bela's brother Coloman, at 33 two years his junior, was also present, and he was generally considered a much better captain than Bela.[56]

It is difficult to imagine what might have broken the stalemate, but on the evening of 10 April a deserter from the Mongols arrived in the Hungarian camp. Some say it was a press-ganged Russian who had managed to escape his intended role as arrow fodder; others that it was a disgruntled Ruthenian slave. In any case, the man brought vital news. It was well known that the Mongols liked to avoid fighting at night and even broke off battles at dusk in order to resume them in the morning. Subedei knew that the Hungarians knew this and planned to turn the knowledge to his advantage by launching a surprise night attack across the bridge, commanded by Batu, preparatory to a dawn assault on Bela's camp. He meanwhile intended to find a way across the river lower down and come on the Hungarians from the rear. It was therefore essential that Batu did not attack prematurely.[57]

Coloman, Ugolin and the master of the Templars, Rembald de Voczon, at once set out with a large force of infantry and marched five miles in the darkness, reaching the bridge at midnight. They found that the Mongols were already well launched on their surprise and were halfway across the bridge. Taken by surprise, the Mongols were driven back and took a lot of casualties from the enemy crossbowmen who at close range were effective in a way they could never have been

on an open battlefield.[58] Thinking they had repelled the main assault by 2 a.m. the Hungarians began celebrating their victory. But the force assaulting the bridge was just one of three. Shiban had been sent north to find a ford, cross the river and attack the bridge from the other side. Subedei meanwhile had, as promised, set off south with a third force, hoping to loop round behind Bela's camp. At 4 a.m., just as dawn was breaking, Batu attacked the bridge again, this time using giant stone-throwing catapults to clear away the crossbowmen.

After some more hard fighting, the Hungarians withdrew to their camp at news that Shiban was attempting to take them in the rear. Shiban pressed on to the camp, where the trio of Coloman, Ugolin and Rembald once more sallied forth with their men to give battle. By now it was about 8 a.m. and Batu had got across the bridge with the main army and was hurrying to support Shiban. Coloman's contingent now found itself in danger of being taken between two fires and retreated to the camp, where most of the Hungarian troops had lingered, somehow imagining that Coloman and his comrades would be able to see off any Mongol incursions.[60] Back at the fortified encampment Ugolin got into a furious slanging match with Bela, accusing him of incompetence: he had made no contingency plans in case the Hungarians had not been able to hold the Mongols at the bridge.

For the third time Batu found himself in a slugging match with the Hungarians on terrain where the Mongols could not deploy in their usual formation. In this phase of the battle he took more heavy casualties and lost thirty of his elite guards. Meanwhile Subedei had found a suitable crossing lower down the river and crossed his forces on an improvised pontoon bridge.[61] Just when the battle with Batu was raging indecisively, Subedei's forces suddenly appeared in the Hungarian rear. At sight of this third Mongol division, the Hungarians' nerve cracked and panic ensued. Now attacking from three directions, using flaming arrows and a range of new weapons, including gunpowder, primitive firearms and naphtha bombs,[62] the Mongols began to eat up their opponents. They overwhelmed the laager with showers of arrows, described as being like swarms of locusts or grasshoppers. Bela could not draw up his troops properly because of the restricted space and soon his men became exhausted from the heat of so many sweating bodies packed around them. The fusillade lasted from early morning until noon, with Coloman and his contingent

holding up best; Bela's brother made three unsuccessful sorties before spurring away on a swift horse.[63] The general slaughter was tremendous. The Mongols then deliberately left a gap in their ranks through which the broken and demoralised Hungarians streamed. Batu, who was dismayed by his casualties, at first did not want to pursue, but Subedei insisted and took charge.[64] More slaughter followed as the Mongols, freed from the constraints of space, could now ride the enemy down and massacre at will. To make matters worse for the refugees, heavy rainfall impeded their progress, turning the ground into a quagmire, and often leaving them trapped in mud and at the mercy of their pursuers. Many others drowned when they were caught at the Danube ferry, plunged into the river only to be swept away by the swift currents and drowned.[65]

The flower of Hungarian chivalry perished that day. Altogether, in the battle and the pursuit the Mongols were said to have slain 30,000, for they massacred non-combatants and camp followers as well. Coloman, though badly wounded, rode to the Danube ferry at Pest, announced *sauve qui peut*, got across and reached Szeged in southern Hungary. In May he joined Bela, who had also escaped, in Zagreb, but never recovered from the wounds sustained at Mohi and died there soon afterwards.[66] Among the notable Hungarian fatalities were Archbishop Ugolin, Archbishop Matthias of Esztergom, Bela's close friend Bishop Gregory of Gyor, Bishop Raynauld of Transylvania, Bishop James of Nitra, Eradius Archdeacon of Vac, Albert Archdeacon of Esztergom and Nicholas of Sibiu, Bela's vice-chancellor.[67] Bishop Bartholomew of Pecs got away and joined Bela later in Dalmatia.[68]

The battlefield at Mohi was a gruesome and piteous sight. More than ten thousand bodies lay there, dismembered by sabres, burned to a cinder, beheaded, some picked clean by corvids and other birds of prey, or by foxes, wolves and hogs. The ground was red with blood, and one could walk for two days through the canyons of the dead, 'nothing but corpses, fallen warriors lying around like stones in a quarry'.[69] The quarry simile was widely popular. In another description, 'Corpses lay around as common as flocks of cattle or sheep or pigs standing on open ground to pasture or like stones cut for a building in a quarry.'[70] Those who drowned in rivers or marshland were eaten by fish, worms and even waterfowl or distorted by water. Others were burnt to a crisp by bombs and gunpowder, and the fat

from burning corpses was so profuse that when peasants tried to incinerate the corpses they put out the fire. Since animals and birds of prey did not like to eat charred corpses, they tended to lie around unconsumed, filling the air with a noisome foetor; the spontaneous necropolis thus engendered diseases which finished off most of the wounded and many of the uninjured.

Wounded and terrified horses wandering distraught across the battlefield added to the impression of hell on earth, and many such valiant steeds had to be finished off by peasants just so that the hideous screeching and neighing would stop.[71] Piles of Bela's gold, silver and other treasures were left on the field. The Mongols, euphoric in victory, were uninterested in looting on the day but came back a few days later, piled up the valuables and then shared it out according to the usual strict formula – always weighted towards the grandees – used by the Mongols when apportioning loot.[72]

Mohi was a classic victory achieved by encirclement – always the great strategist's dream outcome. There have not been that many perfect examples of this almost Platonic idea of triumph on the battlefield – Hannibal at Cannae, Napoleon at Austerlitz and Slim on the Irrawaddy in 1945 being the best known of the handful of instances, but Mohi belongs in that class. Simply put, the Mongols outclassed the Christian armies at every level: discipline, organisation, speed, mobility, disinformation, deception, even weaponry.[73] From China they had brought the gunpowder technology that so startled the Hungarians. Their superiority in archery was such that their arrows penetrated all western armour while their own repelled all western shafts except the crossbow quarrels fired at very close range.[74] They had all kinds of heavy bows, including a giant one that took two strong men to draw, complete with silver-beaded arrows full of holes that made a whistling sound like pipes when shot.[75]

Subedei in his hour of glory also refuted the notion that cavalry could not function without a stable infantry base. The armies of medieval Christendom relied on the mass charge and shock tactics; the Mongols, anticipating Napoleon, on deadly fire. Mohi proved two things: that lightly armed cavalry could always beat heavy cavalry if their mobility was far superior; and that the Mongols, by using deadly fire systematically to pave the way for the final assault, were original, for this was the first time in military history that devastating artillery fire was so used.*

When the Mongols later withdrew to Central Asia, all the vanquished nations absurdly competed with each other for the honour of having 'repelled' the Mongols. The Hungarians claimed that they lost Mohi by the slimmest of margins and only through ill luck; the Poles, equally risibly, contended that they had exhausted Mongol strength at Liegnitz and this was the long-term reason for their failure to invade western Europe; the Germans fatuously maintained that when it came time for the Mongols to face 'real' (i.e. German) warriors they turned tail and fled; the Russians even tried to get in on the act by claiming that the Mongols had lost too many men during the conquest of Mother Russia. This after-the-event vainglory is more redolent of boasting in the pub by a loudmouth than serious historical analysis.[77]

The chief culprit in spreading these nonsensical ideas was Carpini, who convinced himself that he had evolved a formula for defeating the nomads, of which the key element was their alleged fear of crossbows.[78] Naturally they feared them at close range, as in the exceptional circumstances on the Mohi bridge, but crossbows were considered a bagatelle on an open battlefield where they lacked the range to trouble fast, mobile mounted archers. Mongols, conscious of their exiguous numbers, hated taking battle casualties, which was why they liked to line their front ranks with captives forced to fight. Two senior commanders killed in the campaigns in Poland and Hungary hardly constitutes a winnowing.

It is true that Batu found a few hundred fatalities at Mohi too many, but he had only his own blundering to blame.[79] The root cause of the setback at the bridge was Batu's deep jealousy of Subedei. Whereas Subedei and Jebe had worked brilliantly together in 1221–23, the collaboration between Batu and Subedei was not a happy one. One of the jibes made in the drunken outburst by Guyuk and Buri at the infamous banquet was that Batu was a mere glory-hunter, a nonentity and opportunist who hitched himself to Subedei's coat-tails so that he could claim credit for the veteran general's successes.[80]

Certainly there was bad blood between the two commanders. Subedei was irked by Batu's defeatism, his low morale and his reluctance to engage Bela. After the battle Batu, enraged by his casualties, tried to pin the blame on Subedei, saying he had taken too long over his diversionary attack. Calmly and restrainedly Subedei pointed out that whereas Batu had crossed on the bridge at the shallowest point

of the river, he had had to build a bridge downstream where the water was much deeper.[81] Piqued by this, Batu announced that, having won a victory he had done enough and intended to withdraw from Poland and Hungary. Implicitly shaming him in front of the other Mongol aristocrats, Subedei replied: 'You may do as you wish. But I intend to cross the Danube.'[82]

Everybody knew that the victory was really Subedei's and a tribute to his genius, in particular that he knew the courier and yam system inside out so that he could coordinate large forces over huge distances.[83] Mohi was his 65th battle (one for each year of his age) and he had won at least sixty of them.[84] The judgement of a modern scholar is judicious:

> (He) understood the limits and fragility of steppe power; for that reason, his campaigns were always conducted with the greatest economy of force and minimal loss. This he achieved primarily through a remarkable imagination, a thorough understanding of his enemies, and a willingness to take carefully calculated risks.[85]

While the Mongol commanders quarrelled, Bela managed to make a clean getaway. His first port of call was Bratislava on the left bank of the Danube, where Duke Frederick of Austria invited him to be his guest in his domains. The upshot was disastrous: 'Alas the poor king was like a fish who, trying to escape from the icebox, jumps into the fire to be roasted.'[86] Once Frederick had him in his power, he evinced his hatred in two ways. First he unleashed his army on defenceless west Hungary and sent a force to sack the fortress of Gyor on the right bank of the Danube. The locals resisted, penned the Germans up in the castle and burned them alive inside. Frederick sent another army and ordered the fortress burnt to the ground. Enraged by this 'contumacity', Frederick announced that all Hungarian oligarchs would be stripped of everything of value they possessed to compensate for the 'extra cost' of policing west Hungary; he also mulcted any rich Germans who had fled from eastern Hungary.[87]

Then he put in a peremptory demand to Bela for the repayment of an outstanding loan – but which was, in fact, reparation payments imposed by Bela's father Andrew on Frederick after the Austrian-Hungarian war of 1235; Frederick was actually demanding that what he had paid as an indemnity should now be repaid with interest. Bela had no choice: he had to pay the sum or remain Frederick's prisoner. Since he paid mainly in gold, silver, jewellery, goblets and other effects, Frederick was able to cheat him. He put a ludicrously low valuation on Bela's treasures against the mark; whereas the true value of the items was around 6,000 marks, Frederick valued them at 2,000, then presented an account tricked out with compound interest which brought the total ransom to 7–10,000 marks.[88] Somehow Bela scraped up the sums demanded and departed, leaving his wife behind.

He would have his revenge in 1246 when he defeated Frederick at the battle of the Leitha River and killed him; the 35-year-old Frederick was struck through the jaw by a lance.[89] In May 1241 it was as much as he could do to flee south to Zagreb in Croatia, whence he wrote to the pope and Emperor Frederick pleading for an anti-Mongol crusade; so desperate was he that he offered to become the emperor's vassal if he would only help him regain Hungary. Frederick promised help and laboriously assembled an army to be commanded by his son Conrad. But by the time this host was ready to march, the Mongols had already quit Hungary of their own volition.[90] Pope Gregory died on 22 August 1241, making all hope from the Vatican vain. Learning that Bela was in Zagreb, Batu sent Qadan and a large force of picked cavalry after him, hoping to duplicate the successful pursuit and death of shah Muhammad, rather than the embarrassing failure to catch up with the king of Korea.[91]

During the summer and autumn of 1241 the Mongols consolidated their hold on Hungary east of the Danube by a systematic programme of atrocities and extermination: 'like hounds tracking rabbits and boars [they] rushed through the thick of the thorn bushes, the shadows of the groves, the depths of the water and the heart of the wasteland.'[92] It is tempting to see the hand of Subedei in this for, military genius that he was, he was also an old-school, unreconstructed devotee of massacre. Ogodei's veto had prevented him from similar measures at Kaifeng in 1233, but now Subedei was far from 'meddlers' like Yelu Chu Cai and could indulge his natural instincts.

Two things impressed and depressed observers of the Mongols in Hungary. One was their relish for mass rape, with a particular liking for ravishing women before the eyes of their fathers or husbands, though in some cases Hungarian males simply handed over their

women to the Mongols in return for being allowed to keep their cattle, sheep and horses.[93] Another was the way they combined honeyed words with arrant treachery. As they ranged far and wide over the puszta, the Mongols liked to sack towns and watch the inhabitants flee. They would then lie in wait in concealment until the citizens returned to rebuild their shattered homes, thinking the Mongols were far away. The Mongols would then rise up from their ambush and massacre them. Another nasty trick was to announce a general amnesty and even send some of their prisoners into the woods with word that it was safe to surrender; the unfortunates who trusted them would then emerge from the copses and forests only to be slaughtered.[94]

In this way the Mongols soon put a halt to the incipient movement towards guerrilla warfare. Guerrillas can survive only with the cooperation of peasant populations, and who would support guerrillas knowing the terrible and inevitable retribution that would follow? In any case, the Mongols had other forms of control. Many quislings – the most hated people in the ocean of hatred that was Hungary in 1241 – came forward to act as civilian bureaucrats in a puppet administration.[95] After Mohi the Mongols had found the royal seal on the body of the chancellor and cynically used it to issue bogus decrees purporting to come from Bela, ordering people not to flee but to remain in their houses.[96]

In this way the Mongols cut a swathe of destruction right through eastern Hungary in 1241, using their mangonels and catapults against any town that dared to resist them, particularly targeting monasteries as the rallying point of dissidents. The task was relatively simple when compared with China, for there were no cities or fortresses with the strong walls the Jin had possessed.[97] The Mongol armies of destruction fanned out in all directions, as far as the borders of Austria, Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia and Poland. In July one raiding party reached Wiener Neustadt in north-east Austria, south of Vienna.[98]

The winter of 1241–42 was exceptionally severe, and the Danube itself froze. Subedei suggested to Batu that they cross on the ice and carry the destruction into western Hungary. Batu was dubious, fearful lest the frozen surface collapse under the weight of thousands of mounted warriors. Mongol ingenuity, as ever, found a solution. Their wranglers took a herd of horses out into the middle of the frozen river and left them there while scouts watched from the eastern bank.

Sure enough, Hungarians from the west bank, sensing serendipity, came to the middle of the river and took the horses back with them. Knowing it was safe to proceed, the Mongols crossed the river with great speed.[99]

It seems that on the other side they made contact with Qadan, who lamented his failure to find Bela and the paucity of his forces, which made him circumspect about proceeding to the Dalmatian coast where the Mongols would be opposed in strength. Batu divided his forces, gave half to Qadan, and with the other half targeted Esztergom, a wealthy city with a population of some 12,000.[100] The inhabitants resisted, so Batu brought up thirty siege engines, with which he subjected the defenders to a non-stop battering from stones and arrows. Finally, the Esztergomians realised resistance was hopeless, and set fire to all the wooden houses in the suburbs, leaving only the stone palaces unscathed. They buried all their gold and silver, burned all their holdings of precious cloth and killed all their horses so that the Mongols could not have them.

It was this last item that infuriated Batu and led him to issue a 'no quarter' order.[101] The ever-tightening circle soon had the defenders penned up in the palaces. At this point it is related that the three hundred wealthiest and most aristocratic women sought an audience with Batu and begged for their lives. But he was so angry at the stories of the buried loot that he ordered the women beheaded on the spot, then swept in to Esztergom centre and massacred all they could lay hands on, except for a handful who still held out in the citadel under the resourceful Spanish commander, Burgrave Simeon.[102] Batu decided to ignore this and press on to the castle of St Martin of Pannonia where the loot was said to be plentiful. Western Hungary, however, was largely saved from the devastation visited on the eastern part, for three reasons. First, there were few attractive targets left, since the Cumans had laid waste the country when they rose in rebellion after the murder of Koten.[103] Secondly, Batu lacked the resources he had in the east because he had had to detach significant numbers to allow Qadan to pursue Bela to the Adriatic. And, most important of all, within a week of Ogodei's death on 11 December 1241, Batu knew of it. This meant that everything in the Mongol empire was now in the melting pot.[104]

Suitably reinforced, Qadan began the hot pursuit of Bela along the

Adriatic coast. His route after parting from Batu was along the shores of Lake Balaton and then south into Croatia. Bela, aware that Zagreb was not safe from the Mongols, fled south too, always a few steps ahead of his pursuers. At first he made a stopover on Rab, a fourteen-mile-long island off the northern coast of Croatia, supposedly unreachable from the mainland except by specially constructed flyboats.[105] But he never entirely trusted the local ruler and, hearing of the Mongol approach, moved down to Trogir in southern Croatia, a small island city seventeen miles west of Split. Qadan got on his trail, stormed down the coast and sacked Split but was delayed by a false rumour that Bela was holed up in the fortress of Klis overlooking Split, a rocky eminence inaccessible on three sides.[106]

The Mongols laid siege to this fortress in March 1242. Their usual arrow shower made no impression on the defenders, and as Qadan's force was a fast, highly mobile search-and-destroy force, he had no siege engines with him. He ordered his men to make a sneak attack by crawling up the one approach to the fortress on their bellies, but the defenders spotted them and killed a number of them by rolling huge rocks down on them. Infuriated by this, as they always were by casualties, the Mongols unusually came to close quarters with the enemy, so that ferocious fighting took place around, and sometimes on, the walls. The Mongols finally broke in, looted all the houses and uplifted a huge weight of plunder, but the garrison retreated into the even more impregnable citadel.[107]

By now Qadan had received intelligence that Bela had duped them into a sideshow and was nowhere near the fortress. He divided his men in two, one to finish ransacking Split, the other to investigate the approaches to Trogir. The Trogir party issued a formal demand for the surrender of Bela, which the citizens ignored. Construing this as another piece of disinformation like the experience at Klis, Qadan pressed on down the coast and sacked and gutted Kotor (in modern Montenegro).[108] He reached his farthest south at Shkoder (Scutari) in northern Albania but, on reporting to Batu that he had still not found the elusive Bela, he was ordered to cut across country and rejoin the main army in Wallachia, lest he be cut off in Dalmatia by a hostile coalition when Batu was too far east to help him.[109]

In April 1242, accordingly, Qadan marched across Bosnia and Serbia to the rendezvous point. Batu proceeded along the south bank of the Danube to Wallachia, while Orda struck south-east through Transylvania, burning settlements and doling out particularly cruel punishment en route. There was resistance all the way from local tribes, particularly in the northern Balkans.[110] The three armies reunited in Wallachia. As a parting shot the Mongols 'magnanimously' released all their prisoners and told them they were free to go home; they then cynically massacred them under the rubric 'shot while trying to escape'. When they reached Bulgaria, they sacked Tarnovo and mauled the troops of Baldwin II of Constantinople, reminding him that this was punishment for having sheltered the Cumans.[111] Baldwin called for reinforcements from Constantinople.

There followed two battles: the first, a relatively trivial affair, Baldwin won, but then Batu hit back with all his might and routed him in a far more serious encounter.[112] Batu never forgot this 'insolence' and, when khan of the Golden Horde in the 1250s, made a point of exacting tribute from Bulgaria. Finally the Mongols withdrew eastwards through Moldavia and spent the winter of 1242–43 on the lower Volga, where Batu had decided to base himself as heir to his father Jochi's ulus.[113]

The Mongols could feel justly proud of themselves in military terms. During the campaign of 1236–42 they had marched at least 16,000 miles from Karakorum, if we bear in mind the variations in route which meant that they almost never travelled 'as the crow flies', the zigzags to the north and south of Russia and the passages through mountain passes and other difficult terrain, not to mention diversions and sidetrips to 'mop up' recalcitrant foes.

The devastation they had wrought in Hungary was stunning. After 1242 there was widespread famine and heavy mortality among the peasants, who had been unable to sow crops or reap a harvest for twelve months; some said the death toll from pestilence and disease was even greater than the losses inflicted by the Mongols.[114] Abandoned villages, ruined churches and despoiled monasteries were a long-term reminder of the Mongol invasion. The events of 1241–42 in Hungary were deeply traumatic and 'in the time of the Tartars' became for people in the 1260s and 1270s much like 'during the war' for Britons who lived through the Second World War.[115] Some said Hungary had been ruined for centuries. Transylvania and the regions east of the Danube had been hit hardest; the only place west of the river to sustain

serious damage was Esztergom, but we should remember that this region had previously been laid waste by the Cumans (later historians tended to forget this and to lay all the misery at the door of the Mongols).[116] The death toll in 1241–42 is impossible to ascertain accurately – for one thing we are at the mercy of medieval chroniclers – but if we aggregate statistics reported from the various sacked towns (4,000 at Rodna, 6,040 at Bistrita, etc) and add them to the roster of fatalities at Mohi, and then add in the losses from disease and famine, it is easy to get a figure of 25 per cent of the population or 500,000 dead. This is particularly the case if we consider that few of the prisoners taken by the Mongols would have survived; apart from the mass killing in Wallachia before Batu left for Russia, large numbers of them, pressed into service in the front rank, would have been counted among Mongol casualties. Those who survived the battle would not have lasted long on the diet permitted by their captors – largely the intestines, feet and heads of butchered animals.[117] Most modern historians opt for a lower figure, but none goes lower than 15 per cent or 300,000.[118]

Additionally, there was huge displacement of population and large numbers of skilled artisans were transported to Mongolia.[119] Rubruck found that Buri in particular had made slaves of skilled workers, including Germans used in mining silver and manufacturing weapons in remote parts of central Asia. Other captives of note in Batu's camp on the Volga included a Parisian goldsmith, the woman from Metz previously mentioned, the son of an English noble and the nephew of a bishop of Normandy – all people who had the bad luck to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.[120]

The one clear long-term beneficiary of the Mongol invasion was Bela himself, who despite the devastation in his country, could still rally enough resources when he returned to make war on Duke Frederick of Austria and defeat him.[121] Bela had learned a hard lesson from the Mongols, but he did absorb it, even if no one else did: as Denis Sinor remarked, 'For the first time she (Hungary) received a lesson which she was never to learn, namely that it was vain for her to expect any help from the West.'[122] Bela built stone castles and walled fortresses all over his realm and in his obsession with 'the Tartars' became something of an expert on them and was frequently consulted on them after 1242 by Pope Innocent IV.[123] Despite the treachery of the Cumans in 1241, he let them back into his realm in 1245 and began

to fuse them with the Knights Hospitaller as the country's military backbone.[124] Bela also abandoned his 'put the clock back' policy towards his barons and made generous land grants to keep them on his side and lessen the former antagonisms. His one bad mistake was to assign the government of Transylvania to his son Stephen and exercise a dual kingship with him – a disastrous experiment that led to civil war in 1264–65. The great survivor died in 1270, aged 64, after a 35-year reign, having lived long enough to be regarded with high esteem as 'the second founder of the country'.[125]

The Mongol devastation of Hungary alerted western Europe to what might be in store for it: but suddenly Batu and his hordes were gone, the danger was over and Europe could breathe again. From that day to this the question of why they turned back has exercised historians. The most commonly accepted 'explanation' is that after Ogodei's death every Mongol was bound in duty to return to Mongolia to elect his successor. Accepting the (likely) cause of the khan's death as poisoning by his aunt, as against the convenient notion that it was alcoholism, a leading Russian historian has commented: 'This woman, whoever she was, must be considered the saviour of Western Europe.'[126]

But this idea is not convincing, for a number of reasons. In the first place, the quriltai that elected Guyuk as khaghan did not take place until 1246, four and a half years after Ogodei's death. Secondly, Batu did not return to Mongolia (lingering, as we have seen, in the Volga region), for he was very well informed about all the intrigues that flickered through Karakorum after Ogodei's death and thought (rightly) that his life would be in danger.

Thirdly, senior commanders and Mongol notables were not in any case automatically recalled to Mongolia after Ogodei's death. The most salient example is that of Baiju, Mongol commander in Iraq and western Iran, whom Ogodei had appointed as Chormaqan's successor. On 26 June 1243 Baiju won a shattering victory over the Seljuk Turks under Kaykhusraw II at Kose Dag against the odds. (Allegedly he dismissed the numerical superiority of the Seljuks with a typical Mongol comment: 'The more they are, the more glorious it is to win and the more plunder we will secure.') As a result of this triumph, which made the years 1241–43 rival 1220–22 for non-stop Mongol victories, the empire of Trebizond in Anatolia submitted to Baiju and his

armies were able to advance into Syria.[127] But there was no question of his having to return to Mongolia for a quriltai.

Another possible explanation is that the Mongols abandoned the idea of an invasion of western Europe because the terrain, largely forested and with no great plains, would not have provided the forage and pasture needed for their horses and other animals. It is alleged that even in Hungary the Mongols were operating to the limit of their capacity, for the puszta, the Great Hungarian Plain, was the only area of grassland west of the Black Sea capable of supporting horses on any scale; here they were limited to 40,000 square miles, as against the 300,000 square miles in the great steppes of their homeland. To feed 100,000 horses one would need 4,200 tonnes of grain in winter or summer, and where would this come from unless, implausibly, it was transported 8,000 miles from Mongolia? Additionally, warhorses needed a lot of care from grooms and wranglers, increasing the numbers the Mongols would have to deploy, and were susceptible to precisely the diseases and parasites that the cold and damp of northern Europe would engender.[128]

Against this theory one can cite factors which might be considered 'circumstantial evidence'. The Mongols were capable of adapting their military methods, as they demonstrated in the long war with Song China and particularly under Qubilai when they attempted conquests in Burma, Vietnam, Indonesia and Japan – though, with the exception of the conquest of Song China, it is notable that none of these campaigns was successful. Napoleon operated with huge numbers of horses in his conquests and as late as the Second World War the Germans were able to utilise millions of horses even with the depleted grazing grounds in industrial Europe. One can, however, argue that such comparisons are anachronistic: by the time of Napoleon much more of Europe had been converted to pasture, and in the case of the Second World War one has to factor in railways, superior veterinary corps and mobile horse transports, none of which was available to the Mongols. Tellingly, though, the Huns under Attila, also entirely dependent on horses for their military superiority, fought campaigns in Italy and France, where it was not problems of pasture that halted them. A judicious conclusion would be that horses and pasturage certainly played *some* part in the Mongol decision to withdraw.[129]

Another popular theory is that the entire question is misplaced.

since the Mongols never intended to conquer western Europe. According to this version the Mongols invaded Hungary purely to punish Bela for having harboured the Cumans and to ensure that there could be no threat to Batu's ulus in Rus – the Golden Horde.[130] This idea has the merit of simplicity – for the Mongol withdrawal would then need no explanation – but is in conflict with a mass of inconvenient evidence, not least that the Mongols were hopelessly divided. In short, while this was almost certainly Batu's aim, it was not Subedei's, as he stated that his dream was to behold the Atlantic. There is no documentary evidence as to what exactly Ogodei's instructions to his two commanders were, but it is likely that they were issued on a contingency basis – that if the conquest of the Rus states and eastern Europe went well, he would provide the necessary resources for the conquest of western Europe.

What is certain is that Batu's decision to return to the Volga caused a major rift with Subedei. He cut all his links with Batu, rode back to Mongolia with his retainers and openly supported Guyuk and the houses of Ogodei and Tolui against Batu and the house of Jochi. He avoided all involvement in the murderous intrigues of 1242–46 but was present in 1246 at the quriltai that elected Guyuk. He then retired to the homeland of his Uriangqai tribe east of Lake Baikal, where he died in 1248 aged 72.[131] His son Uriankhadai went on to great things under Mongke in the war against the Song.

It is fairly clear from all the evidence that Subedei, Ogodei and Guyuk all wanted to conquer western Europe. Carpini in 1245 reported that Guyuk had a threefold project: election as khaghan, defeat of Batu in the civil war that had by then broken out between them, and then a fresh invasion of Poland and Hungary as a launch-pad for the conquest of Germany and Italy.[132] Guyuk claimed he wanted to attack Germany first, and proved that he had very good intelligence about the emperor Frederick's military capability, but Carpini told his colleague Salimbene di Adam he was convinced that Guyuk's real objective was Italy, both because of its wealth and because that was where '*Stupor Mundi*' (not to mention the Pope) had his power base. Despite Carpini's boasting about German military might, which implied that the choice of Italy was the softer option, the likelihood is that the Mongols, knowing of the emperor's predilection for Italy, had simply decided to go for the jugular.[133]

Carpini noted that Guyuk was supremely realistic and was planning for a campaign that was expected to last eighteen years before victory was assured. As to the chances of success, the consensus of historians then and since was that the Mongols would have reached the Atlantic, but only provided their empire was united in a concerted, monolithic endeavour. Nor would Byzantium have been spared, as a Byzantine expert has pointed out: 'The successors of Genghis Khan . . . could doubtless have swept the Byzantine as well as the Latin and Bulgarian empires out of existence had the mood taken them.'[134] This was all the more so since, whereas the Mongols knew every last nuance of European politics, the West was still mired in ignorance about them, variously identifying them as the Ishmaelites or the Antichrist, the forces of Satan, the chaos world, the allies of heterodoxy, anarchy and disorder, fomenters of Islam, Cathars, Lombardy separatists or even the shock troops of an international Jewish conspiracy.

The West, in short, was long on emotion but short on reason and intelligence.[135] Carpini claimed to have discovered the secret of how the West could defeat the Mongols in battle, but this was no more than propaganda to keep Western spirits up.[136] While he whistled in the dark, more sober observers were stupefied by the Mongol withdrawal and suspected it might be like the Greeks' abandonment of Troy when they left behind the wooden horse. Matthew Paris thought the 'Tartars' would come again and that nothing could stop them reaching the Atlantic.[137] The Council of Lyons in 1245 heard an estimate from one bishop that the war with the Mongols might well last thirty-nine years – it is not clear where this exactitude came from.[138]

The sober truth was that by 1242 the Mongol empire was hopelessly divided by faction fighting, that civil war loomed and that anything so momentous as an invasion of Western Europe was not remotely conceivable. Batu, in short, withdrew from Europe because of manpower shortages and the looming conflict with Guyuk, and retreated to the upper Volga to prepare for the trial of strength which he knew would come.

His main problem was an acute lack of men. Once it was known that Ogodei was dead, the levies formerly loyal to Guyuk and Buri demanded to be allowed to return home, and there was nothing Batu could do to stop them unless he wanted a mini-civil war in his own empire; Mongke went with them, taking back to Karakorum his own anti-Batu version of the infamous banquet and the subsequent feud.[139] It was then that Batu showed his calibre as a politician. He may have been mediocre as a battlefield commander but he excelled in diplomacy and intrigue. Even before Ogodei died, while Batu planned the future of what would become the Golden Horde, he decided to shore up his position by seeking allies among the Rus princes, and he proved a shrewd picker.

Deeply unpopular with Novgorod's boyars, Alexander Nevsky had left the city for two years after his victory over the Swedes at the Neva but was then hurriedly recalled when the Teutonic Knights invaded Russia and took the city of Pskov to the west of Novgorod.[140] Purging the pro-German clique in Novgorod, Nevsky engaged the knights and their allies in a minor battle on the ice of Lake Peipus on 5 April 1242. The numbers involved on both sides were not large; only about one hundred Teutonic knights took part, with the rest of their army being Swedish and Lithuanian volunteers. Nevsky won a complete victory, though the Suzdalian chronicle attributes the real merit in this success to Alexander's brother Andrei.[141] Only about twenty knights were killed (hardly indicative of a major encounter' as a sceptical historian notes), and there was no mass destruction when the German army plunged through the ice after it gave way under their weight.[142] Russian nationalists such as the Metropolitan Kirill in his *Life of Nevsky* elevated what was not much more than a skirmish to one of the great battles of the ages; Soviet propagandists reinforced this bogus view and this is the perception that has stuck.[143] Nevsky, meanwhile, was acclaimed as one of the very greatest Russian heroes, and canonised by the Orthodox Church both for his staunch opposition to overtures from an ecumenical Vatican and for his stoical and self-denying submission to Mongol rule.

The historical Nevsky, as opposed to the legendary creature so beloved in Russian mythology, was a slippery and serpentine character. The most significant thing about the battle of Lake Peipus is that Batu's envoys were present at Nevsky's side as military advisers; certainly the threat from the Teutonic Knights was the most important factor leading him to throw in his lot with the Mongols.[144] In fact Nevsky's relations with the Mongols were a tale of ambivalence and duplicity, with the hero self-servingly and ruthlessly focusing on his ambitious political goals; it was this that dictated his unswerving loyalty to Batu and his successors.[145]

Batu rewarded him by supporting him against his brother Andrei, who favoured religious rapprochement with Rome. The Mongols were very hard on Russians who tried to entangle the Vatican, though to be the 'nerve centre' and real seat of power in the West. When Alexander's father Grand Prince Yaroslav seemed likely to renounce Russian Orthodoxy and submit to the papacy, the Mongols had him poisoned, though authorities differ on whether the 'contract' on his life was ordered by Batu or Ogodei's widow Toregene.[146] After Batu's death Nevsky enjoyed particularly good relations with the next khan of the Golden Horde, Sartaq (he was said to have entered into an *anda* relationship with him) who became a Christian. Even though Sartaq was probably poisoned by his uncle Berke, who succeeded him and converted to Islam, Nevsky continued on amicable terms with the new khan. As he had shown in the case of his father, and now his blood brother, Nevsky was not the kind of person to allow emotion and sentiment to get in the way of realpolitik.[147]

Ogodei's death really signalled the end of the Mongol empire that Genghis had striven so hard to found, though the formal structure continued in existence until the end of the 1250s. Guyuk was not elected as khaghan until 1246, a delay which had a fourfold explanation. It took that long for his mother, the Regent Toregene, to muster the necessary support; there was uncertainty about Batu's intentions, with Subedei vainly trying to act the honest broker and reconcile him and Guyuk; there was a general moral crisis in Mongolia because of the widespread rumour that Ogodei had been poisoned; and the shamans all declared that an early election would be inauspicious.[148]

During the four-and-a-half-year regency, Toregene and her close friend from Khorasan (originally her maid), Fatima, presided over bloody purges, including the arrest of Genghis's brother Temuge and the execution of all leading members of his faction. But she still faced the seemingly insuperable obstacle that both Koden, Ogodei's second son and Genghis's personal choice to succeed Ogodei, and Shiremun, Ogodei's grandson and his *own* personal choice, had better claims than Guyuk.

Koden did not trust himself to Toregene's mercies and formed a rival court in the former Qara Khitai, to which fled all Ogodei's former ministers dismissed by the Regent, especially Chinqai and the two Yalavachs. Toregene announced that both these candidatures were

invalid: Shiremun was too young and Koden too sickly – a prize piece of humbug, given that her beloved Guyuk enjoyed even worse health.[149] She did not long survive her triumph in seeing Guyuk elected in 1246, and on her death Guyuk put her policies into reverse. He restored the disgraced ministers and executed his mother's favourite Abd al-Rahman, to whom she had given the tax-farming concession in China. When Koden died mysteriously and in suspicious circumstances, Guyuk put Fatima on trial for having compassed his death by witchcraft and had her killed too, apparently by throwing her into a fast-moving river, knowing she could not swim. He also had Temuge executed.[150]

Guyuk made clear his contempt for all previous Mongol history by declaring that Ogodei had been not tough enough as khan and far too lax in all key areas. His authoritarian turn of mind was well illustrated by the peremptory demand he sent to all European rulers in 1245, ordering them to submit; surprisingly, he has nonetheless found scholarly defenders.[151] Batu declared his election illegal on the grounds that, as senior Mongol, he had to be present at a quriltai for its decisions to be binding. Guyuk tried to hamstring him by declaring a crusade against the West, but his sister-in-law Sorqoqtani, Tolui's widow, kept him informed of all that happened at Karakorum and this ploy came to nothing.[152] Civil war was imminent when Batu and Guyuk began advancing towards each other in 1248. With Batu having crossed the River Ili and Guyuk as far west as Beshbaliq, Guyuk suddenly died; his poor health (he suffered acutely from colic) and alcoholism were blamed but many suspected poisoning, with Sorqoqtani as the mastermind.[153]

There followed another three-year female regency, with Guyuk's widow Oghul Qaimish, a notably foolish woman, on the throne. Meanwhile Sorqoqtani, described by Rashid al-Din as the most intelligent woman in the world, worked behind the scenes to secure the elevation of Mongke, her son (and Tolui's eldest), to the khanate. She and Batu were on very good terms as a result of her services to him during Guyuk's reign and also because she shared the creed of Nestorian Christianity with his son Sartaq.[154]

In 1251, with the support of Batu, Mongke was elected khaghan. He was an intensely serious ruler, the first non-alcoholic khan since Genghis, and under him foreign conquest once more became a priority.

He had no interest in western Europe, probably because that would have meant treading on Batu's toes, and devoted most of his energies to a renewed war with the Song. He did, however, have one of the abiding faults of the Mongols: blood-letting. He executed the ex-regent Oghul Qaimish and also Buri, to please Batu, who had never forgotten the insult at the banquet in 1240. Oghul Qaimish had joined a plot to murder Mongke and place Shiremun on the throne, in which a number of Mongol princesses were involved. These women were beaten with burning sticks to make them confess, and Mongke and his supporters milked the conspiracy for all it was worth.[155]

Shiremun himself was found to have been involved in the intrigue but Mongke did not kill him at once, and instead sent him to the front in China where the khaghan's brother Qubilai commanded the army. This turned out to be a reprieve only, for Shiremun, having failed to die fighting in China, was finally put to death in spring 1258 when Mongke went south to take personal charge of the campaign against the Song. All three hundred or so of Shiremun's closest supporters perished in a bloody purge immediately after the attempted coup.[156]

In 1259 Mongke died, either of cholera or dysentery, the first Mongol khan to die while actually campaigning.[157] This was the point at which the unified empire definitively broke up, though the Golden Horde had been independent in all but name since 1242. Two separate and simultaneous quriltais elected different great khans. Qubilai emerged the victor in this struggle and went on to found the Yuan dynasty in a united China in 1279.

The empire shivered into four parts. Apart from Qubilai's China and the Golden Horde, which dominated Russia for another two hundred years, there was the Chagatai Khanate in central Asia (covering parts of the modern nations of Mongolia, Russia, India, China, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan)[158] and the Ilkhanate, founded by Mongke's brother Hulagu in 1256 and including eastern Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia, western Afghanistan, south-western Pakistan and parts of modern Turkmenistan.[159] Just thirty years after Genghis's death his mighty empire had crumbled into four realms with different destinies. It is a measure of his genius, and of the talent of his son Ogodei, that the entire mighty edifice had lasted so long.

Conclusion

Genghis Khan was the greatest conqueror the world has ever known. He and his sons vanquished peoples from the Adriatic to the Pacific. The Mongols eventually reached Austria, Finland, Croatia, Hungary, Poland, Vietnam, Burma, Japan and Indonesia. His empire stretched from the Persian Gulf to the Arctic Ocean. Mongol influence extended as far as Mali in Africa. The Mongol empire covered twelve million contiguous square miles – an area as large as Africa and bigger than North America; by contrast the extent of the Roman empire was about half that of the continental U.S.A. By 1240 Mongol conquests covered most of the 'known' world and, even at Genghis's death in 1227, embraced more than half this world.[1] The modern population of the countries ruled by the empire at its greatest extent contain three billion of the world's seven billion population.

All this was achieved by a man who seemed to come from nowhere; the only similar feat, though in a very different sphere, was that of Jesus of Nazareth. Genghis had no tradition to build on, for although there had been powerful steppe kingdoms and nations before him, he was unaware of them.[2] Alexander the Great had a powerful military machine constructed by his father Philip of Macedonia; Julius Caesar had three hundred years of Roman military superiority to build on; Napoleon could rely both on the ancient French tradition of Condé and Turenne as well as the élan of the French Revolution and the mass mobilisation it unleashed.

In a real sense Genghis had to invent his own tradition and solve a plethora of political and social problems as he went along. Besides his military and administrative genius and his uncanny ability to read men, Genghis was truly original in that he saw how it was possible for nomads, employing the quantum leap in military technology

afforded by his mounted archers, to dominate civilised societies and extract tribute from them. All this he did while being illiterate and having no access through books to the wisdom of the ages. By contrast, Alexander was taught by Aristotle, one of the great minds of the ages, Caesar had the best education Roman wealth could buy, and Napoleon was heir to both the Enlightenment and the Romantic movement, deeply influenced as he was by both Rousseau and Voltaire.

On paper a primitive nomad, Genghis was not disfigured by racial or religious prejudice, and was fascinated by written scripts, literature, culture and the teachings of sages. It is not a mere trope that in Buddhist historiography Genghis and Qubilai are regarded as the successors of Ashoka.[4] He soon realised what he could gain from collaboration with alien cultures. He transcended the limitations of such as Subedei by appreciating the advantages that could accrue from learning from China and Islam, even if this irritated the more purblind Mongol princes, and thus revealed himself as the supreme pragmatist.

But there was nothing one-dimensional about him. His attitudes reveal deep ambivalence and complexity: between conservatism and innovation, between ancient and traditional modes of thought and the fresh and original, between visions of world empire and a semi-mental, nostalgic hankering after old nomadic ways, and even between the quasi-Pauline notion of 'one nation' of Mongols and his instinctive preference for 'divide and rule', as conveyed in one of his sayings: 'People conquered on different sides of the lake should be ruled on different sides of the lake.'[6]

If ever the phrase 'great man' applied in history, it applied to Genghis. He may also be the man with the greatest number of descendants in history. Geneticists have recently established that about 0.8 per cent of the population of Asia has an identical Y-chromosome, indicating the likelihood of a common ancestor, possibly some time around 1000 AD. This would imply that about 0.5 per cent of the world's population has this common ancestor and that he has 16–17 million descendants.[7] Another study, by entirely different geneticists, shows clear evidence of Mongol DNA entering the Hazara people of Pakistan around 1300. Furthermore, six other populations, as far west as Turkey, show similar evidence of genetic mixing with Mongols as conquering soldiers begat offspring on women in conquered areas. The Uighurs have 50 per cent Mongol genetic input, the Uzbheks 39

per cent but the Turks only 8 per cent, showing the kind of progressive westward decrease in Mongol ancestry that one might expect.[8] The easy availability of huge numbers of women to Genghis and his sons, as to no other identifiable Asian personality, makes it likely that Genghis might be this mysterious philoprogenitor. It is argued that if Genghis had thirty-two children (a reasonable assumption) and each of those had another sixteen, even if the numbers of offspring decreased steadily and arithmetically over the generations, as the Mongols ceased to have such automatic access to women when the empire declined, it would take only about three hundred years to reach sixteen million inhabitants. That would take us to the mid-sixteenth century. If we then factored in childhood deaths, mortality from war and disease, this would explain why that number was not in fact reached in the sixteenth century but only in the late twentieth century.[9]

Nevertheless the theory has not been generally accepted. The difference of a couple of centuries between the dates of Genghis's life and the timing of this putative ancestor could no doubt be explained away, but there are simply too many imponderables to allow such a neat calculation, and even on the best-case scenario, the most we would have, without a tissue sample from Genghis himself, is probability. The 'Genghis as father of us all' school probably represents the extreme end (and some might say the *reductio ad absurdum*) of the 'great man' approach to history.

Of course to historians of a certain kind any elevation of the individual is unpalatable and misleading. Engels famously stated that great men appear when a given socio-economic situation requires them, but the argument is circular because the only sign that social circumstances require them is the fact that they actually do appear.[10] This proposition first made its full-blooded appearance in the writings of Montesquieu in the eighteenth century. He wrote:

> It is not chance that rules the world. Ask the Romans, who had a continuous sequence of success when they were guided by a certain plan, and an uninterrupted sequence of reverses when they followed another. There are general causes, moral and physical, which act in every monarchy, elevating it, maintaining it or hurling it to the ground. All accidents are controlled by these causes. And if the chance

of one battle – that is, a particular cause – has brought a state to ruin, some general cause made it necessary for that state to perish from a particular battle. In a word, the main trend draws with it all particular accidents."

Pace Montesquieu, this is a mere assertion and is not borne out by Genghis's career, where chance and contingency played so great a part. It was chance that in his youth the old Mongol confederacy had degenerated into a shambles, so that his followers were more closely tied to him as a charismatic leader and not a mere contestant for the khanship with other chiefs or his own brothers. Moreover, not being a member of the senior Mongol lineage, he could create his own dynasty and his own despotism without being hedged in by tradition. Also, the early death of his father meant he did not have to wait in the wings as, say, Marcus Aurelius had to for twenty-two years as deputy to Emperor Antoninus Pius. It was chance that he was not killed in battle or by disease. The accumulation of contingent circumstances goes on and on.[12]

In their reluctance to concede that great individuals really can and do make history, and in the absence of any socio-economic 'requirement' in Mongolia in the late twelfth century, some historians have fastened on climate as the key factor explaining the rise of Genghis Khan. Climatic determinism is a very old idea, going back to Montesquieu and, beyond him, to Ibn Khaldun in the fourteenth century.[13] Montesquieu's case is particularly relevant, as he loathed the Mongols, thought that Asia was irremediably wedded to despotism and slavery, and that climate was the root cause.[14] Theories on the Mongols and climatology essentially cluster into five groups, apart from Montesquieu's strict determinism.

The first is that in some general way, not particularly defined, the climate and environment on the steppe produced a particular kind of hardy people. This idea is particularly associated with the Russian theorist Lev Gumilev. Annual vacillations in solar radiation determine the amount of grassland that can be used for grazing livestock. A critical column of air – what Gumilev calls a 'transtropic maximum' – responsible for cyclones and rainfall, may have moved away from the steppes because of solar activity, engorging the Caspian but desiccating the Aral Sea.[15] In some unexplained way this connects with 'passionarity' – the level of activity a people needs for expansion. According to Gumilev, all ethnic groups pass through phases of birth, development, climax, inertia, convolution and memorial. National 'passionarity' at the 'acmatic' (i.e. climactic) phase leads to great conquest; according to Gumilev it was the Arab world that was in this phase in his lifetime but it was the Mongols who were at this level in the late twelfth century.[16]

Some may feel these ideas are metaphysical and even mystical. The other notions are more comprehensible. The second climatic theory is that aridity on the steppes forced the Mongols outwards on their course of world expansion, and that drought favoured the nomads more than settled communities, who could not simply load their effects onto carts and trek on.[17] An ingenious variant of this is that it may simply have been a decrease in winds and sandstorms that released the Mongols from a cycle of subsistence.[18] Drought and desiccation are of huge importance on the steppe, for if desert increases at the expense of pastureland (as has happened in Mongolia in the past half century), the consequences are serious.[19]

The third idea is that cold weather and polar winds are the key factor. Some claim that Jin China during the crucial years 1211–34 was the victim of unusually cold weather, and that such conditions in northern Eurasia in the 1220s generally weakened resistance to Mongol expansion. But the theorists espousing this interpretation have been accused of neglecting subtleties and nuances, for example extrapolating from conditions in Alaska and Switzerland to those in Mongolia and China and not factoring in longitudinal differences; for example, it is pointed out that whereas Greenland was colder than usual in the period 1180–1210, northern Scandinavia was hotter in 1160–90.[20] The fourth idea is that it was wetter conditions that aided the rise of the Mongols, since high grassland productivity caused by this meant that more horses could be raised and therefore the potential for foreign adventures increased. According to an influential coterie of tree-ring scientists, in 1211–30 Mongolia experienced one of its coolest and wettest periods ever, precipitating a boom in grass production, livestock and human population.[21]

Most promising of the climatic arguments are those that make climate one of a network of causal factors and differentiate clearly between necessary and sufficient conditions. The leading Mongolist

Owen Lattimore, for example, amalgamated a 'neoclassical' view that nomads moved out of Mongolia because of ecological and climatic factors coming from outside with a 'semiclassical' view that overgrazing desertification and climate change.[23] Following the example of the American climatologist Ellsworth Huntington, Lattimore fused climate with a cyclical view of history. This is interesting on two counts. Lattimore was famously identified by Senator McCarthy as a leading 'Red' in the 1950s but his views were at a considerable distance from orthodox Soviet Marxism, which pushed hard the idea of a linear development in history, from primitive communal societies to slavery to feudalism and finally to capitalism. Cyclical views of history, associated with Machiavelli, Vico, Gibbon, Nietzsche, Herder, Spengler and Arnold Toynbee, are usually considered the prerogative of the political Right.

Lattimore's spirals were complex. He claimed that to say Genghis Khan appeared like a thunderbolt, as it were from nowhere, seriously distorted the history of the steppes. On the other hand, the Mongols were not just a rerun of the Hsiung-nu and earlier nomads; there was a sense in which Genghis was 'emergent' and represented an advance.[24] Lattimore's borrowings from Marxism, in short, were idiosyncratic and eclectic. A similar 'pick-and-mix' attitude to orthodox Marxism is evident in the work of Gumilev who tells us that 'the unification of the steppe was a historical necessity'[24] ('why?' one asks) but adds that it was not historical necessity that it was Genghis who should prevail; it could have been Jamuga, or the Kereit or the Naiman, and it is in this area that chance and contingency take over. Gumilev is multicausal also in pointing out that, under pressure from climate, the Mongols hunted out both wild ungulates and natural predators – even wolves were under threat from their ferocious dogs and trained eagles.[25]

Finally, there are those who adumbrate a theory of psychological types derived from climate, again a development of Montesquieu. For example, 'Such a climate [the steppes] forms a type of man who is incredibly tough, of an almost superhuman endurance, adaptable, alert in mind but not devoted to metaphysical speculation.'[26]

Two things are very clear. First, there is a widespread resistance to the idea that Genghis as a genius might have been causally responsible for almost the entirety of his achievement. Secondly, arguments about the Mongols derived from climatology tend to end in a cul-de-sac through lack of evidence, self-contradiction or being cancelled out by rival theories starting from the same initial premise. Simple correlations between Mongol expansion and climate change are not tenable, as some additional factor is always needed to make the argument cogent.[27]

But the story of climate and the Mongols does have one interesting twist. The Mongol invasions resulted in vast tracts of formerly cultivated land, devastated by the invaders, being reclaimed by forests, while the culling of the population by the wars themselves and the resulting plagues and diseases accelerated this process. It has been estimated that in this way 700 million tons of carbon were eliminated from the atmosphere – enough to offset an entire year of pollution from petrol (gasoline) in the modern world.[28] Genghis and his sons, it seems, were not just red with blood but, unknowingly, environmentally green.

The hottest topic involving Genghis Khan and the Mongols is their responsibility for worldwide fatalities in the forty years or so after 1206. There is the wildest divergence here and although balance is necessary, it is hard to attain. There is a tendency for writers on Genghis to bifurcate into extremism of one kind or the other, either accusing or rehabilitating. One school of thought would make the Mongols culpable for just about every military atrocity that has ever occurred; the other would make them harbingers of world peace and security, beset by a few regrettable excesses. One historian makes Genghis responsible for the ferocity not only of the Spanish *Reconquista* against the Moors in the late fifteenth century but also their massacre of the Aztecs and Incas. The Mongols are supposed to have imported ruthless ferocity to Islam, which in turn transmitted it to the Crusaders, and thence back to Spain and, after Columbus's voyages of discovery, the New World: 'the awful fate of the Incas and Aztecs . . . ultimately washed back to Genghis Khan himself.'[29] A better historian has riposted that 'ruthless ferocity' was actually introduced to Islam by the Crusaders.[30]

On the other hand are the writers who soft-pedal the casualties caused by the Mongols and stress instead their enlightened attitude to women, their avoidance (mostly) of torture, their transmission of culture and the arts and, even, their role as fount and origin of the

Renaissance.[31] Of course in a quasi-Hegelian sense in which everything ultimately links with everything else, such connections can be made, but this one seems fanciful and far-fetched. These divergent modern views are a projection across the centuries of the diametrically opposed views of the Mongols entertained in thirteenth-century England. For Matthew Paris the Mongols were Gog and Magog aroused from their slumber, they were the demons of Tartarus, the myrmidons of Satan himself. For the great Franciscan thinker Bacon the Mongols represented the triumph of science and philosophy over ignorance.[32]

There can be no denying that Genghis and the Mongols were responsible for millions and millions of deaths. Different reasons have been adduced: the Mongols spread terror and cruelty because they had a small-scale steppe mentality transposed onto a global stage; because in terms of the Mongols' divine mission resistance was blasphemy;[33] because they feared and hated walled cities and expended their fury on them once taken; because it was the most efficient way to warn already conquered peoples not to attempt 'stab in the back' revolts as the Mongols pressed ever onwards. The simplest explanation for the chilling policy of 'surrender or die' was that the Mongols, as a far from numerous people, were always obsessed with casualties, so that the best-case scenario was a walkover surrender in which none of their troops died. This explains why nearly all the cities that surrendered without even token resistance received relatively good treatment.[34]

Since one version of Genghis is that of a cruel despot who raised mountains of human skulls, we should first ask: how many died as a result of his wars and conquests? This is a peculiarly difficult question to answer, for a number of reasons. Ancient and medieval chroniclers routinely multiplied numbers, sometimes tenfold, so we have to discount their figures; on the other hand, modern historians in general have an almost equal and opposite tendency to 'downsize' to evince their scholarly scepticism. Estimates of fatalities can be made only when we have accurate population statistics, but medieval census figures are unreliable. Finally, calculating war losses is a notorious minefield; scholars cannot even agree on figures for deaths in the Second World War.

The obvious starting point is the twenty-three-year war Genghis waged in Jin China, for this was his toughest campaign, the longest

and most calamitous in terms of loss of human life. What was the population of Jin China in 1211 and what was it in 1234 when Genghis's successor Ogodei emerged triumphant? The census conducted in China in 1236 by Yelu Chu Cai reported 1,730,000 households and eight and a half million people, whereas the last Jin census (1207–08) produced 7,684,438 households and 45,816,079 people.[35] The one before that, in 1195, recorded 58,834,711.[36]

That would indicate a catastrophic decline in population, but the huge crevasse between the two figures alerts us that there is something very wrong here. Various explanations have been adduced, and it is likely that all are valid. Many census evaders hid in woods or mountains; the Mongols themselves took away tens of thousands of craftsmen; many Chinese emigrated to south-east Asia or at least to Song China to escape the Mongol invasion.[37] Even more potently, many Chinese went unreported in areas where Mongol lords had enslaved them, causing them to disappear from the records. Children were left off the census returns on the grounds that they might not survive the high rate of infant mortality. But most of all there was bureaucratic corruption and incompetence. Officials hated the chore of periodic censuses and simply guessed or made up the figures; in some cases they under-reported so as not to incur a higher tax quota.[38] There are so many variables to be considered in assessing the population of medieval China that any conclusion is bound to be impressionistic.

The problem did not end in the Mongol era. A distinguished Sinologist has concluded that, depending on which model one uses, the population of China in 1600 could have been 66 million, 150 million or 230 million.[39] An 'educated guess' as to the total numbers in China, after the Mongol conquest of the Song in 1279, puts the numbers somewhere between 110 and 150 million, with perhaps 80–100 million in the former Song south, sustained by Champa rice.[40]

The population decline in northern China as a result of the Mongol conquests may have been exaggerated in the past but it was still substantial. Was it huge? One of the problems is that different experts have given different answers to different questions. Some assess the death toll over the entire Mongol period of hegemony in the Far East, from 1206 to 1368. Others group together the fatalities from the wars of Genghis, Qubilai and Tamerlane. With little help from scientific

demography, we can only infer from other great Chinese military catastrophes, involving devastation similar to the Mongol invasions, bearing in mind that the fatalities in those conflicts are also disputed. The two obvious analogies for the Mongol invasion of 1211–34 are the An Lu-shan revolt under the Tang dynasty in 755–63 and the great Taiping rebellion of 1850–64. Figures of 36 million dead have been claimed for the An Lu-shan convulsion, although sinologists describe this statistic as absurd.[41] The generally accepted figure is 26 million and, even if we halve that for reasons of caution and scepticism, we are still left with the huge figure of 13 million for seven years of warfare.[42] As for Taiping, incredible figures as high as 100 million have been claimed but again, no reputable scholar is prepared to go below a figure of twenty million dead, and this is regarded as a conservative minimum.[43] Twenty to thirty million dead in the Taiping rising, lasting fourteen years, and 26 million in the An-Lushan, lasting seven, can be convincingly correlated with the twenty-three years of Mongol-Jin conflict. As a kind of footnote one could add that 27 million were killed in the Sino-Japanese conflict of 1937–45.

In short, sustained warfare in China always produces massive casualties. And there are natural disasters to be taken into account also, which thirteenth-century chroniclers would be unlikely to treat in detail. The Yellow River, scene of so many battles between Genghis's captains and the Jin, carried off between one and two million people in 1887 and another 500–700,000 in 1938 after terrifying flooding, and in 1931 China lost between 2,500,000 and 3,700,000 to floods.[44] Many casualties even in modern warfare are not listed in official statistics. A recent view is that the Japanese in 1941–45 killed 30 million Filipinos, Malays, Vietnamese, Cambodians and Burmese, which, if true, would take the fatality roster for the Second World War, currently anywhere between 75–82 million, well over the hundred million mark.[45] Even the Thirty Years War (1618–48), fought in supposedly civilised Europe, reduced the population of Germany from 21 million to 13 million and accounted for eleven and a half million deaths (the birth rate partly compensating for the huge death rate).[46] The mortality in King Leopold's Congo in 1885–1908 was at least ten million and possibly as high as 22 million.[47] (Incidentally, it should be noted that children born during wars are often not recorded on the grounds that they might not survive, and in medieval times there was very high child mortality.)

All of this is circumstantial evidence for the terrifying figure of deaths in China in 1211–34 – thirty million – which is widely accepted: perhaps 7.5 per cent of the total population of the world at that time.[48] To the probable 30 million deaths in China we can add at least another seven and a half million from the campaigns against Khwarezmia in 1220–22 and those in Europe in 1222–23 and 1237–42. In the case of Khwarezmia we are at sea, for there is no reliable information whatever about the population of medieval Iran.[49] We have only the chroniclers and the later reports of the great traveller Ibn Battuta in the early fourteenth century to go on.[50] Some authors are prepared to accept their ludicrous figures for deaths at Merv (1,300,000), Herat (1,600,000) and Nishapur (1,750,000), although it is obvious that the chroniclers have added a nought in each case, magnifying the casualties tenfold. Such writers claim that Genghis killed 15 million people in Khwarezmia (possibly three times greater than the entire population) and that Iran did not regain its pre-Mongol demographic level until the mid-twentieth century.[51]

From all the best scholarship on casualties in this war, it is more likely that the losses, though huge, were not at such stratospheric levels. Possibly the population of Iran declined from five million to 3.5 million, and that of Afghanistan from 2.5 million to 1.75 million. If we also discount the hyperbole of the chroniclers to the effect that Russia lost half its population, a more sober estimate would see the Russian population declining from 7.5 million to seven million.[52] The death toll due to the Mongols in Russia and eastern Europe would therefore be around the million mark. If we add Russia, eastern Europe, the Khwarezmian empire to China and Genghis's minor wars, we end up with the convincing total of 37.5 million.[53]

This enormous toll is partly attributable to the 'surrender or die' policy and the stiff-necked opposition of populations who had been beguiled by their own rulers' propaganda and did not know what they were getting into. The murderous quality of Genghis was overdone by Islamic historians, who regarded the Mongols as 'The Great Satan', and ignored the atrocities and massacres committed by their own side, especially Jalal al-Din. The distortion was further increased when the Mongols colluded in exaggerated stories about their brutality, hoping to scare the enemy into giving up without a fight, out of sheer terror. There are no signs in Genghis of a mindless or psychopathic cruelty;

everything was done for a purpose.[54] And that purpose was not savage blind ferocity or conquest simply for plunder, as with previous nomads, but with the purpose of conquering the world in the name of Tengeri and establishing an empire out of which the Mongols could suck tribute, enjoying the fruits of conquest without having to relinquish the traditional way of life that Genghis held so dear.[55]

Since Genghis considered his role as world conqueror self-evident, there was no need to work up hatred against the conquered or make out that his enemies were subhuman. He was admirably free of both racial prejudice and religious intolerance. Many of the contemporary attacks on him were propaganda attempts to encourage native resistance against the invader, eruptions of emotion in response to the deep trauma of defeat or simply ignorant attempts to explain the inexplicable phenomenon that had appeared from the East.[56]

To an extent the Mongols had themselves to blame for their bad press, for they were notorious for not keeping their word. They would have approved of Hobbes's dictum (previously quoted) that covenants without the sword are but words, and one of Genghis's sayings was a cynical gloss on this: 'Game killed by mouth cannot be loaded onto a horse. Game slaughtered by words cannot be skinned.'[57] The stories that each Mongol killed one hundred people in Khwarezmia in five years lost nothing in the telling, even though it seems a far from impossible target in theory. In the realm of absurdity, however, is the story that 50,000 Mongols had to kill twenty-four people each in a single day. As a modern commentator has remarked,

> Who would have maintained order as the victims awaited their turn for execution? How could knives and swords have been kept sharp for such an arduous task? Where would the mounting piles of bodies and their possessions have been stored? Would the executioners have worked shifts and continued through the night? Would food and drink have been served to executioners and victims as the job proceeded?[58]

Another consideration is that it was often the Mongols' local recruits who were more enthusiastic at slaughter than the Mongols themselves; the behaviour of the Georgians at the siege of Baghdad in 1258 is a case in point.[59] It is important not to judge Genghis by twenty-first century standards but to see him in the context of general behaviour

in the thirteenth century. He exceeded in degree but not in kind the other killers of the age. One could give any number of instances: the slaughter of the Song by the Jin in Kaifeng in 1127; the massacre of the Albigensians by fellow-Christians at Béziers and Carcassonne in 1209; Edward I's butchery of 8,000 Scots at Berwick in 1296; the 30,000 Hindus killed at Chittor in 1303 by the troops of Ala al-Din Khilji; the Byzantine blinding of the Bulgars in 1014; the behaviour of Christians at Antioch and Jerusalem during the First Crusade – one could go on and on. It is wisest to accept the judgement of a notable historian of Russia: 'Chingis was no more cruel, and no less, than empire builders before and since. Moral judgments are of little help in understanding his importance.'[60]

Another crime laid at the door of Genghis and the Mongols is their alleged enslavement of Russia. From this, it is alleged, comes the Russian propensity for autocracy and the long line of despots stretching from Ivan the Terrible to Putin with Peter the Great, Catherine the Great, Lenin and Stalin being only the most notable. Echoing the psychologist C. G. Jung, who saw Hitler as an introjection of Wotan and the German forest gods, some Russian specialists have speculated that two and a half centuries under the 'Mongol yoke' left a permanent scar and that Russia absorbed tyranny into its collective unconscious, thus retarding the nation by three whole centuries.[61]

The best Russian scholars reject the idea and claim that the impact of the Mongols on Russian life was superficial. Donald Ostrowski says that sixteenth-century Russian Orthodox divines played up the 'Mongol yoke' to disguise the failings of the nation and especially those of their own church.[62] George Vernadsky considers that the long-term Mongol impact was largely beneficial, as it absorbed Russia into the international network of long-distance trade, and through the *Pax Mongolica* co-opted the Rus states into the medieval world's 'globalisation'; in this view he is endorsed by Charles Halperin.[63] Particularly in the north-east, the principalities had not only recovered from the Mongol invasions by the 1280s but received a major fillip from the expansion of the Mongol-driven 'world system'.[64]

In the nineteenth century, when imperial propaganda made a point of attributing any and every problem to the pent-up consequences of the 'Mongol yoke', the seclusion of women, said to be a consequence of the mass Islamic conversion of the Golden Horde, was also laid at

the door of Genghis and his successors.[66] Unfortunately for this perspective, the Mongols did not seclude women. Carpini, Rubruck, Marco Polo and all other travellers to the Mongol courts testified to the prominent position of women in Mongol life, often using the fact as an excuse for a rant on this 'unnatural' approach to gender relations. Halperin, indeed, goes further and argues that seclusion was an indigenous *Muscovite* tradition, beginning in the sixteenth century.[67] The most one can say about Russia is that it borrowed many things from the administrative practices of the Mongols – they would have been foolish not to – and that the Yasa in particular influenced Russian law and culture.[68] The 'Mongol yoke' argument was sometimes used in the Soviet era, but by then most efforts were concentrated on proving that the rise of Genghis represented the triumph of feudalism over the clan principle, thus neatly slotting him into the paradigm of historical materialism as required by orthodox Marxism. It was ironical that the early Soviet scholars used Marxism to interpret Genghis and the Mongols, for nomadism was probably the most implausible sociological category to be explained by class analysis.[69]

Just as there is every reason to rehabilitate the Mongols against unjust accusations of extreme cruelty and barbarism, which plunged the nations they conquered into darkness, so one has to be careful in assessing the great benefits to the world often ascribed to Genghis and his successors. There are two main views. One credits the Mongols with introducing a long era of peace in Eurasia, allowing a kind of early globalisation to flourish, while the other is sceptical and claims that, if there really was a *Pax Mongolica*, it was a very short-lived affair.

The pro-Genghis camp asserts that it was as a result of his activities that China was brought into contact with the Islamic world and thus with the West, since the West had already made its presence felt in the Muslim world during the Crusades. Trade and the Yasa were the main pillars of the Mongol peace, aided by the yam. The Mongol propensity for trade rather than war gradually increased, particularly when Genghis himself was won over to the idea that agriculture generated more wealth than nomadism.[70] It was said that you could travel from Palestine to Mongolia with a gold plate on your head and not be molested, but the journey was still an arduous one because of primitive transport. Even in the glory days of the *Pax Mongolica*, it took a traveller 295 days to get from Turkey to Peking.[71]

Yet the Mongols undoubtedly opened up the world. Until 1250 there was in the West a narrow European viewpoint which saw the world virtually end at Jerusalem. The journeys of Carpini, Rubruck and Marco Polo (and the Chinese traveller Rabban Bar Sauma in the opposite direction) cleared the way for new vistas. Learned people finally got a sense of the size of the world and its population.[72] The globe shrank as Venetian traders appeared in Peking, Mongolian envoys in Bordeaux and Northampton, and Genoese consuls in Tabriz. There were Arab tax officials in China, Mongolian lawyers in Egypt, French craftsmen in Karakorum. The art of Iran was influenced by Uighur and Chinese motifs.[73] From China to the Islamic world and Europe came the knowledge of firearms, silk cultivation, ceramics and woodblock printing.

The Mongol empire, in short, served as a transmission belt for trade, technology, science and culture, particularly but not solely between Iran and China, and the Mongol conquests were the rivet that held the 'world system' together for a hundred years after 1250.[74] The southern route of the Silk Road, which had fallen into disuse in favour of the northern and middle routes, was revived and linked the Aral and Caspian Seas with Byzantium.[75] The beginnings of a Mongol aesthetic culture were discernible, even though most Mongol literature dates from the fourteenth century. There was, however, a poem written in 1225 about an archery contest held to commemorate Genghis's return that year from his triumph in Khwarezmia. Mongol sculptures, dealing with death, natural life, warfare and mythology and generally carved on rock faces – petroglyphs – grew ever more sophisticated, as did their frescoes and paintings on Buddhist themes, foreshadowing the eventual conversion of Mongolia in the sixteenth century to Lamaistic Buddhism.[76] Finally, some writers trace a causal line from the *Pax Mongolica* to the discovery of the New World by Columbus.[77]

That the Mongol conquests resulted in greater global knowledge, that culture and technology was transmitted from western Europe to China and vice versa via the Middle East, that religious conversions in faraway lands became possible, all this cannot seriously be doubted. But did this constitute a genuine *Pax Mongolica*? Carpini's statement that there was no significant theft or robbery in the Mongol empire in the mid-1240s has been much commented on[78] but was he present at an untypical moment? Some historians claim that, if there was a

Pax Mongolica, it was short-lived, possibly enduring only the twenty years from 1242–61.[79] After that the empire splintered into four fragments – some of which were hostile to others, as the Ilkhans to the Chagatai realm and the Golden Horde to Qubilai's China. There was no comparison with the *Pax Romana* which lasted two centuries.

Others say that it was largely one-way traffic, as there were no Chinese equivalents of Rubruck, Marco Polo or John of Montecorvino. The diplomatic contacts between the Mongol world and the West were nugatory and largely petered out.[82] The importance of journeys across Asia from the West has in any case been exaggerated; it bears no comparison to the breakthrough achieved in the Age of Discovery from the late fifteenth century on. The collapse of Genghis's unified empire was one of the key factors allowing Europe to pull ahead of the Orient by the sixteenth century, and this process began as early as 1260.[83] A true world system is possible only if maritime trade is brought into the picture, but the Mongols feared the sea (rightly, as it turned out from their later abortive invasion of Japan) and preferred a gruelling journey overland of possibly eighteen months to the terrors of the ocean, with the Indian Ocean being the main barrier.[84] The security offered to international traders was supposed to be predicated on the early partnership between Genghis and his successors with merchants, but this was no ideological affair whereby the Mongols uniquely favoured mercantile endeavours. Mongols did not regard the mercantile interest as a thing apart and, if merchants were found on enemy territory, they too were regarded as hostile and could be slaughtered or their goods confiscated as the local commander saw fit.[85]

Finally, there were unintended consequences deriving from the role of the empire as a hinge for the 'world system'. Rinderpest or steppe murrain, a disease in ungulate animals similar to measles in humans, devastated cattle herds in Asia from the 1240s on, spread by the Mongols' great conquests of 1236–42. Even worse, the Mongols may have been responsible for the spread of the Black Death. Even though there are many conflicting views on the origin of this pandemic, it seems clear that central Asia was a major vector of the disease, in particular the new avenues of the Silk Route opened up by Mongol conquest which had their terminus at the Crimea.[86]

The empires of Alexander the Great, Tamerlane and Napoleon crumbled as soon as they died. It was the genius of Genghis to construct an empire that lasted longer, and it says little of Ogodei that he took his father's legacy and expanded it to its greatest extent. The house that Genghis built was unique, a one-off, *sui generis*. It is not amenable to any general explanation and presents a stubborn and irreducible mass standing in the way of any smooth, linear conception of history. Devotees of such linearity are hugely tempted to make Genghis's 'nomadism-plus' society into a subgroup of feudalism, but all the usual definitions of the term, involving interstitent labour and military service to a liege-lord, do not cover the Mongol experience.

The temptation is clear, for the formation of a retinue system (the *nokor*, the keshig) usually marks a decisive step in the transition from a tribal to a feudal order, as it cuts across kinship relations, substituting conventional for biological bonds of loyalty.[87] The Russian historians spoke of 'nomadic feudalism' and even the great Mongol scholar Rachewiltz refers to 'a kind of feudalism'.[88] But feudalism was primarily an economic affair, whereas the key to the Mongol empire was always personal relations and personal policies, as we can see in the differential policies of Genghis and Ogodei. Always mindful of the Mongols' small numbers and the consequent impact of casualties, Genghis used slave labour at home and foreign troops abroad, and transported artisans, craftsmen and experts to Mongolia. Ogodei then shifted towards the exploitation of the settled population, concentrating on duties on trade, taxes and *corvée*.[89]

But the Mongol system was always inherently unstable, as they neither traded nor produced so depended entirely on the toil of the conquered. Like the shark or Lewis Carroll's Red Queen, the Mongols could not stand still and had to move constantly forward. Nomadic pastoralism was a more highly specialised and skilled exploitation of the natural world than pre-feudal agriculture, but increases in productivity were impossible, unlike in agriculture, as the ratio of humans to livestock was fixed. Soil can be improved but herds require land which must remain the same; agriculture, in a word, can change qualitatively but pastoralism only quantitatively.[90] Pastoralism as a mode of production was incompatible with a political structure of state-directed extraction of tribute. The 'contradiction' between a world empire and a nomadic base was marked.

Moreover, the Mongols could not go on conquering indefinitely,

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which their system required if tribute was to be distributed to an ever-increasing number of oligarchs with 'entitlement'. Even if they had reached the Atlantic, sooner or later the bubble would have burst, and as soon as this happened the contraction would be exponential. The Mongol empire was thus doomed to two different species of impossibilism. Its inner dynamic would in the end bring it crashing down. And in any case the leaders faced a dilemma. If they remained as nomads, they would have to impose semi-pastoralism on the conquered, but the demographic increase of the 'natives' would eventually lead them to rebel and overcome the oppressors. It must be remembered that the ratio of Mongols to tribute-bearing people was about one to one hundred.[92]

On the other hand, to abandon pastoralism and horses – the engine of conquest – would be to throw their best card away. If they merged with the conquered through processes of denomadisation, acculturation, sinicisation and so on, they would lose their military superiority spontaneously, again inviting their subjects to rebel and displace them.[93] The great civil war between Qubilai and his younger brother Ariq Boke in 1260–62 was essentially about the collision between the approaches of acculturation and defiant nomadism respectively.[94] With hindsight, one can see the entire Mongol experiment as ultimately doomed from the outset, though of course contemporaries could not construe it thus.[95]

By a curious historical irony, it was nomadism itself, requiring a high degree of cooperation and thus preventing a strict division of labour and hence the emergence of an intellectual or literate elite, always nudging the leaders towards meritocracy, that won Genghis his current reputation in Mongolia as the father of democracy and an ethnic hero.[96] It is altogether just that Genghis should be partially rehabilitated. Alexander the Great, Napoleon and Julius Caesar slaughtered and massacred (Caesar is alleged to have killed one million Gauls between 59 and 49 BC) but it is their achievements that are usually celebrated, not the blood-letting. But it would be a mistake to go too far in the direction of the modern trend for hagiography. While the Mongols' military achievements were stupendous, they were otherwise totally parasitic. They were unoriginal, founded no new religions, produced no worthwhile cultural artefacts, developed no new crops or new technologies (though they transmitted existing ones), created no worthwhile painting, pottery, architecture or literature and did not even bake bread; they essentially relied on the captive craftsmen and experts for everything. Their motto could almost have been the infamous one by the French symbolist writer Villiers de l'Isle-Adam: 'As for living, our servants will do that for us.'[97] Their fabled skill in building bridges scarcely compensated.

The Mongols were an unbalanced people. They had achieved a quantum leap in military technology putting them far ahead of western Europe, but the Europeans meanwhile were producing Roger Bacon, Dante, Anthony of Padua, Thomas Aquinas and even Frederick, *Stupor Mundi*, and St Louis. The Mongols ratcheted up hecatombs of slaughter and, while western Europe was also guilty of horrific atrocities, especially against the Albigensians, it was at least producing the *Divine Comedy*, the *Carmina Burana*, the *Roman de la Rose* and the amazing series of cathedrals either completed or begun in the thirteenth century: at Chartres, Amiens, Reims, Beauvais, Toledo, Burgos, Cologne, York, Lichfield and Salisbury.

Genghis was the greatest conqueror of the ages but alongside a man who was an exact contemporary, Francis of Assisi (he died in 1226) he seems a moral pygmy. The parallels between the two are fascinating. Twelve hundred and six, the year of the great quriltai that turned Temujin into Genghis Khan, saw Francis's breakthrough trial before Bishop Guido. Genghis's ascent of Mount Burqan Qaldun is paralleled by Francis's descent into the caves of Subiaco.[98] There are other convergences. Francis was in Egypt when Subedei and Jebe on their great raid were (relatively) close by. In Jungian terms Genghis can be seen as the overdevelopment of the animus or masculine principle, with St Francis overdoing the anima or feminine principle. There are further curiosities. The Franciscans were particularly badly treated in Hungary, so Subedei's devastation of the country could almost be seen as a kind of divine revenge. And it was the Franciscans who first made contact with the Mongols and brought back an amazing story that will endure as long as mankind itself: the career of Genghis Khan.